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Up the Garden Path with Dubuffet¹

In the decades since the publication of *Asphyxiante culture* and the first two volumes of *Prospectus et tous écrits suivants*, Jean Dubuffet's writings have generated almost as much interest among academic critics as his paintings and sculptures.² Not only a prolific writer, Dubuffet was an exceptionally articulate and informative commentator on his own work, and the many lucid and analytical "auto-commentaries" that figure in the essays, prefaces and talks collected in the *Prospectus*, in the thirty-eight-volume *Catalogue des travaux de Jean Dubuffet* and in his extensive correspondence³ have revealed a highly reflective and reasoned underpinning to his artistic activity and offered very useful perspectives on both the constants and the variables in his wide-ranging œuvre, on the ways in which his successive series were developed and on the technical detail of his methods and handling of materials. Significant sections of the writings collected in the four-volume *Prospectus* have been translated and anthologised in exhibition catalogues and in free-standing compilations of his writing and, with his published correspondence, have offered scholars a ready-made template for the analysis of his artistic output. Dubuffet's more polemical writings — in particular *Asphyxiante Culture*, but also related texts such as "Positions anticulturelles" and "Honneur aux valeurs sauvages"⁴ — have become more or less compulsory points of reference in any discussion of Art Brut/ "Outsider Art" in its various guises and they frequently figure also as indicative coordinates in more general surveys of the art, culture and cultural theory of the mid-twentieth century.

By contrast, Dubuffet's writings in "jargon"⁵ have received much less attention, most studies simply mentioning them in passing. The reasons for this relative neglect are readily identified. Most of these volumes were published in small print runs and may be consulted almost exclusively in the special collections of research libraries. In addition, their inaccessibility is not simply physical; usually hand-written, mangling the syntax of standard

French, using approximate, idiosyncratic and inconsistent phonetic spelling, and ignoring the spacing conventions of the standard written language, they resist immediate understanding, often yielding their meaning only after they have been decrypted or read aloud. Moreover, the deciphered text often seems to be a poor reward for effort: ostensibly, the content is banal, repetitive and at times obscene.

Of the few critics who have discussed the *jargon* texts at any length, the work of Michel Thévoz is the most sophisticated and suggestive. Thévoz opts for a biographical and psychoanalytical approach, arguing that what he sees as the artist's problematical relationship with language originates in his difficult relationship with his authoritarian, bibliophile father who preferred the company of the books in his extensive library to that of his wife and son and who expected from the latter the attainment of the first place in all his school-subjects,⁶ Drawing on Dubuffet's *Biographie au pas de course* ("Biography at a sprint"), Thévoz highlights the association established in the boy's mind between the visual arts and the feminine and advances the view that Dubuffet's antagonism towards instituted language and what Thévoz sees as the artist's uglossic tendencies — manifested in the invented "langue peau-rouge" ("Red Indian language") that he used in his childhood games,⁷ in his fascination with graffiti, with hieroglyphics and various ancient and modern languages,⁸ in his championing of *poésie brute* and in his *jargon* texts — can productively be read in terms of repressed oedipal drives:

At the origin of Dubuffet's literary activity there is therefore a utopia, or "uglossia" as the linguists call it, or in other words the belief in a first language, pre-Babel, phylogenetically anterior to the law of the Father, and consequently untouched by any sollicitation of power, a primitive language, childish in the etymological sense of the word, a language, if we can risk this paradox, hallucinated at times by paranoiacs or mediums. The logophobia manifested toward the languages so improperly called

“natural” is always the other face of a passionate logophilia, polarized by an intrauterine fantasy of interpersonal fusion, of immediacy, of unity, of totality, of ineffable communion.⁹

According to Thévoz’s reading, Dubuffet’s phonetic transcription and his defiance of the “censorship” imposed on the play of meaning by standard spelling not only obstruct intelligibility; by forcing the reader to articulate physically the words, Dubuffet “reactivates the libidinal genealogy of verbal expression and the excremental origin of concepts.”¹⁰

While Thévoz’s chapter is a fascinating exercise in psychoanalytical criticism, it is ultimately a rather speculative piece and offers little direct insight into individual works. Yannick Chevalier’s 2003 article “‘Monumental et irrécusable’: l’écrit en jargon de Dubuffet” focuses on Dubuffet’s three earliest *jargon* texts (*Ler dla canpane*, 1948, *Anvouaiaje par in ninbesil avec de zimaje*, 1948 and *Labonfam abeber, par inbo nom*, 1950) and highlights parallels with Raymond Queneau’s work.¹¹ However, citing a letter from Dubuffet from 1962, he accepts claims that the *jargon* texts from then onwards are written in “‘complete jargon’, that is composed of words whose meaning is problematical”¹² and does not consider the very important *La botte à nique* which, as we shall see, is ultimately decipherable.

In those critical studies that refer more broadly to the *jargon* texts, the latter figure largely as instances of a more general trend in contemporary writing and as adjuncts to Dubuffet’s anti-cultural/ pro-*art brut* campaign. Most frequently, critics set these works within the context of the radical disruption of standard French conventions perpetrated by a number of contemporary writers, many of whom Dubuffet knew well. Suggestive comparisons are drawn between Dubuffet’s aesthetic principles and practice and the poetry of Henri Michaux, Francis Ponge and André Martel who served as his secretary for a period,¹³

with the theatrical writings of Antonin Artaud, whom Dubuffet helped to support financially towards the end of his life, and with the fiction of Ludovic Massé and Henry Poulaille.¹⁴ Dubuffet's interest in the work of Raymond Roussel and, in his later years, in that of Robert Pinget and Valère Novarina is also indicative of a shared fascination for the ludic and the neologistic.¹⁵ However, it is, of course, the novels of Louis-Ferdinand Céline and of Queneau that are generally regarded as offering the most telling parallels with Dubuffet's anti-cultural stance and his *jargon* texts.¹⁶ Disintangling strands of influence is always problematical but, in the case of Dubuffet, the problem is compounded by his declarations and disavowals of allegiance and by the ever-changing dynamics of his relationships. His communications with Queneau are telling: letters from 1950¹⁷ show a slightly deferential Dubuffet at pains to convince the novelist that, when he wrote his first *jargon* texts, he had been unaware of Queneau's "Ecrit en 1937," the essay that might be regarded as the first of two manifestos for *le néo-français*;¹⁸ twenty years later, in a note to Jacques Berne, he claims that the novelist had in fact copied him.¹⁹ Moreover, while the affinities noted by critics indicate shared preoccupations and an intellectual context that fostered linguistic sedition and inventiveness, none of these comparative lines of enquiry has been pursued far enough to offer real purchase on the purpose and compositional principles of individual *jargon* works.

Alongside the biographical and contextual explanations, most critics who refer to the *jargon* texts read them as, at most secondary, indirect and — for some — essentially facetious, expressions of a sustained rebellion against instituted "Culture." The evidence in Dubuffet's correspondence and writings to support such an interpretation is strong. Thus, in a 1962 letter to Jacques Berne,²⁰ Dubuffet insists on his desire to produce works that would be resistant to critical classification and recuperation, that would have no readers and that would be fundamentally unsellable, while elsewhere he predicts the demise of spelling and grammar instruction in schools²¹ and does not miss a chance to attack the "culture police," the

“professors,” “the bourgeois caste,” or the “intellectual” who “chews over ideas.”²² Further support for this anti-cultural interpretation is found in various communications relating to the second Compagnie de l’Art Brut and in the compilation within the Compagnie’s collection of a body of writings “that seem to us to relate to the norms of conventional literature in the same ways as Art Brut works relate to works belonging to the cultural arts.”²³

However, this approach remains very broad-brush, treats the *jargon* texts as a homogeneous corpus and seriously underestimates the complexity of at least some of these volumes. The present study aims to take discussion beyond these, usually summary, generalisations. Focusing on *La botte à nique*, the article will — through a detailed analysis of its principal lexical, syntactical and metaphorical patterns and an examination of the interaction between the verbal and visual elements — demonstrate the volume’s linguistic, formal and thematic richness and will make the case for a reflexive interpretation that reads *La botte à nique* as a metaphorical restatement of some of the painter’s most dearly held aesthetic principles and as a summative commentary on his artistic production up to that point. Following an initial consideration of the circumstances of its publication, its ostensible content and its formal composition, the article will show that in *La botte à nique* Dubuffet is engaged in a prolonged defamiliarising meditation on the everyday and on language itself that presents clear parallels with his painting and sculpture, before proceeding in the final section to an analysis of the reflexive dimension of the volume and its status as a kind of stocktaking résumé of his artistic career.

La botte à nique: publication, “content” and form

Of his works in “jargon,” *La botte à nique*, the volume that Dubuffet contributed to the prestigious Skira series “Les Sentiers de la création” (“The Paths of Creation”) is the most

substantial and the most complex, combining as it does his longest published text in “jargon” with a series of one hundred and two *Hourloupian* images.²⁴ The “Sentiers de la création” series was a landmark word and image project, that can be seen as symptomatic of a more general interest in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the processes by which the work of art is produced and as closely related to the development of French genetic criticism. Edited by Gaëton Picon and published between 1969 and 1976, the series ran to twenty-six volumes by leading contemporary artists, writers and thinkers, including a number of friends and acquaintances of Dubuffet (Michaux, Ponge, André Masson, André Tardieu, Claude Simon and Claude Lévi-Strauss), and consisted of a wide and diverse range of visual-textual combinations that all, in one way or another, pertained to the genesis of the work of art.

The history of Dubuffet’s involvement in the series appears to have been somewhat chequered. His initial unfavourable reaction to the invitation is recorded in a 1968 letter to Picon in which he declares his wish to keep his distance from this sort of “high cultural” publisher, arguing that a book of the sort that — he assumes — is envisaged would run counter to his own artistic inclinations and would lead to misunderstanding of his work.²⁵ Four years later, in another letter to Picon dated 24 March 1972, Dubuffet returns to the question of a contribution. It is not clear whether the letter arises from ongoing discussions between artist and editor or whether Dubuffet has renewed discussion. However, he tells Picon that he has “something that might fit the bill”²⁶ and proposes to let the latter look at it to make a judgement. In their commentary on this development,²⁷ Julien Dieudonné and Marianne Jakobi isolate a sentence from the letter (“As you’ll see, for the most part it falls into the unacceptable category”)²⁸ and argue that *La botte à nique* was composed as a challenge allowing him “to use the collection’s prestige to further the subversive purpose of his logological project”.²⁹ Dieudonné and Jakobi further contend that the *prière d’insérer*, drafted by Dubuffet, is to be interpreted as a kind of “dunce’s gesture of defiance to the

institution that is welcoming him in”;³⁰ thus, to their eyes, Dubuffet’s reprise and reworking of the “path” metaphor on which the series title is based is marked by a rather heavy-handed irony:

No doubt the creative process is happiest at the stage when its paths have not yet been cleared. As soon as they have been, that’s when it starts to observe itself in action and that’s not very good for its health. Close behind the paths come the boulevards and these lead directly to distortions and to retardant conservatism. What suits creation best, as I see it, are thickets and no paths at all, or else well-hidden paths that only the creative process itself can sense or has even forgotten, and, above all, no boulevards and, above that, no esplanades. Creation just can’t breathe on esplanades and yet (thinking that they are giving it a better view), people insist on taking it there.³¹

However, there is nothing in Dubuffet’s letter to Picon that indicates a desire to cock a snook at Skira or the series. On the contrary, the terms in which he expresses himself are much more conciliatory and tentative, and he seems to have undergone a change of heart in the period since the initial correspondence on the topic. This is essentially an exploratory communication in which he offers to submit his work to Picon to be considered for inclusion in the series. He appears to be offering a piece of work that is at an advanced stage of development and declares that, if Picon does not consider it appropriate, he will do something else with it: in short, in giving a clear signal that he has not composed to commission and that he has other options for the project, Dubuffet reaffirms his independence. However, even as he sets his terms (he wants a quick decision), he also bows to Picon’s professional judgement as editor, and his reference to the likelihood that what he is offering will not be considered suitable suggests advance face-saving rather than the sort of combative attitude attributed to him by Dieudonné and Jakobi. Moreover, while the *prière d’insérer* with its repetition of the word “sentier,” might be construed as an ironic and rather perverse comment on the title and

conception of the series that effectively dissociates him from it, this is not the only possible reading and, indeed, this document is wholly compatible with many of Dubuffet's most restrained and analytical aesthetic statements regarding the defamiliarising function of art and, in particular, his determination to "forcefully hawl the mind out of the ruts in which it normally travels."³²

That *La botte à nique* and, indeed, many of the other *jargon* texts are to be seen as rather more than periodic anti-cultural gestures of defiance is also suggested by the care that Dubuffet took in their creation.³³ Technically, *La botte à nique* is a complex work and, although the final version was produced by a flourishing art publishing-house with world-ranking expertise, the creation of the maquette was an intricate and essentially artisanal process.³⁴ Printed in heliogravure, the published volume comprises 106 pages in which the text, written in long-hand, and the *Hourloupe* images are interwoven in varied ways across the work. Sometimes text and image face each other on opposite pages; sometimes the text is interrupted by images (consisting of single or multiple *Hourloupe* forms) that run across a double spread;³⁵ sometimes the image is integrated — always in a different position — within the body of the text. The image may run the length or breadth of the page acting as a vertical or horizontal border; it may form a horizontal band within the text, as on page [7], or, indeed, curve around the text, as on page [44]; elsewhere, images occupy opposing corners of the page, with the text occupying the other two corners. The relationships between the image and the original paper support are equally varied: the backgrounds vary from plain white, to light blue, to grey, to solid black, to the fine stripes of brown wrapping paper, to the print of a page from *Le Monde*; and, in some instances, the *Hourloupe* shapes incorporate gaps or "apertures" that make the *fond* an integral part of the *forme*. Finally, while some of the *Hourloupe* forms appear to have been drawn directly on the page, others have been created as elaborately constructed collages (sometimes using newspaper), the internal and external

outlines of which have been hand-traced in marker pen and which have been affixed to the background.

Perhaps most surprisingly, the text is equally intricate. Dubuffet's "jargon" is far from being an amateurish and approximative attempt to mimic orthographically the pronunciation and "mistakes" of popular spoken French. Indeed, notwithstanding his sweeping predictions regarding the demise of standard written French, Dubuffet also acknowledged the effort required to disengage from conventional forms not only in his painting, but also in his writing.³⁶ Close examination of the text of *La botte à nique* shows not only a highly developed awareness of the differences between standard French spelling and the sounds and forms of colloquial French, but also a detailed and sophisticated understanding of the structural differences between written and spoken language. Once one starts to penetrate what initially looks like a solid wall of unfamiliar and often bizarre morphological units, one begins to realise that, in *La botte à nique*, the "jargon" implements in a sustained and systematic manner a high proportion of the linguistic patterns and practices identified by academic researchers as typifying features of spoken French. Thus, the text of *La botte à nique* includes examples of the following procedures, which have all been discussed extensively in the French-language research literature:³⁷ use of "que" as a universal conjunction and as a universal relative pronoun replacing the other relative forms (*passim*), addition of "que" to adverbs and prepositions to form conjunctions,³⁸ doubling of subject/object, dislocation, and presentative forms,³⁹ generalised use of *ça* to replace other pronouns,⁴⁰ contraction of subject-pronouns so that "il" becomes "I" before a vowel,⁴¹ use of ethic dative,⁴² simplification of consonantal clusters,⁴³ gemination (doubling of consonants),⁴⁴ truncation of unaccentuated vowels/ elision of middle vowels,⁴⁵ adverbial use of prepositions,⁴⁶ elision of "r" in "parce que" (*passim*), schwa-epenthesis,⁴⁷ parataxis (*passim*), use of familiar expressions,⁴⁸ omission of "ne,"⁴⁹ nominalisation,⁵⁰ and instability in spelling

(to be discussed below). Notwithstanding, then, Dubuffet's claim in a letter to Jacques Berne⁵¹ that he had never studied linguistics, detailed analysis of the language of *La botte à nique* offers unambiguous evidence of the artist's understanding of the morphological and syntactical deviations that distinguish colloquial French from "standard" French and, above all, highlights the linguistic intricacy of that text.

Yet, despite the formal complexity and linguistic attentiveness of *La botte à nique*, its content appears to be of the most humdrum nature, consisting principally of what seems to be a disjointed series of, at best commonsensical, but frequently very obvious and circular statements about gardening, tools, plants, trees, crops, weather and the uses of different natural products. Opening with the repetitive and circular "First off you need to hoe with a hoe for hoeing it's a hoe that you use" [3],⁵² the text piles on self-evidence after self-evidence, pleonasm after pleonasm, only occasionally interrupting the flow of banalities by the inclusion of a disorienting whimsical comment, before ultimately giving way to what appears to be complete nonsense in the final few pages. In short, it would seem that Dubuffet imposes upon his hapless reader the task of solving his linguistic conundrums, only to deliver a content that appears to be no more than "the drivel of *Monsieur-Tout-le-monde* or the wild imaginings of a senile gardener."⁵³

However, as is often true in Dubuffet's work, initial appearances are highly deceptive. Not only do the more fanciful passages suggest that there may be rather more here than a semi-literate parodic variation on the gardener's almanac, but examination of the linguistic procedures deployed and of the motifs that punctuate the text reveals parallels both with Dubuffet's more orthodox writings and with his painting that suggest that *La botte à nique* is to be read both as sustained exercise in defamiliarisation and an indirect and metaphorical summary of some of his most fundamental, long-held aesthetic principles. It is to the development of this argument that the article now turns.

Defamiliarizing the World and the Word

Although in his publications and correspondence there is no evidence to suggest that Dubuffet was consciously drawing on particular aesthetic, theoretical and philosophical debates in the formulation of his artistic principles and priorities, his writings are punctuated by statements suggesting strong affinities between his conception of art and the formalist notion of defamiliarisation. For Dubuffet, as for Viktor Chkloski,⁵⁴ art serves to suspend, interrupt or undermine the ways in which we habitually perceive the world. Its prime role is to renew our perception of the world, to make us *see* rather than simply recognise the banal objects that surround us and that we take for granted in the natural attitude: “[A work of art] must have that rare power to reveal to whoever looks at it an aspect of things hitherto unfamiliar to him; it must have the effect of renewing his vision, of inducing in him a new way of looking at and conceiving things.”⁵⁵ On the most obvious level, Dubuffet seeks to bring this renewal about in part through his choice of subject-matter. Throughout his career Dubuffet was drawn to the everyday, the overlooked and the discarded, and repeatedly he forces the viewer to attend to the infinitely complex textures and patterns of the natural and man-made surfaces of her/his environment or the most basic, functional utensils, tools, and other objects that s/he handles on a daily basis.⁵⁶ Similarly, in *La botte à nique*, Dubuffet focuses his reader’s attention on the elemental and the elementary: on the ground at her/his feet, on the primordial gestures of human activity (in this case planting and growing), on the repetitiveness of the tasks associated with cultivation, on the rudimentary tools that humankind has devised, on the seasonal rhythms that the cultivator must follow, on the basic produce yielded and on the uses to which man puts that produce. In short, like much of his work, *La botte à nique* can be read as a return to matter. Here, the anonymous sententious narrator bombards the reader with self-evident statements of fact (“the trunk is made of

wood” [33], “you make planks out of wood” [35], “every year the leaves fall” [36], “when there are a lot of trees it’s called a wood” [37], “beans give you wind” [44]), with gardening advice (*passim*) and with lists of types of flowers, fruits, vegetables and their uses (“you make cider out of apples” [38–39], “there are potatoes for making purée” [43], “there are pine-cones for lighting the fire” [67], “on All Saints Day there are chrysanthemums which you take to the cemetery” [83], etc.).⁵⁷ The simplicity of the sentence-structures, the repetitive, declarative and paratactic discourse and listing of items are part of a consciously developed and sustained minimalist stylisation that foregrounds the everyday and the overlooked, reminds the reader of all that goes into growing the most commonplace plants, the extraordinary complexity of what takes place in the simplest plot of cultivated ground, the multifarious uses to which we put these various things that sprout and grow around us and the innumerable ways in which they are woven into our daily lives.⁵⁸

Central to that process of defamiliarisation is the language in which these basic elements, environments and gestures are expressed. The prolongation of the perceptual process and the establishment of impediments that retard recognition are key elements of Dubuffet's aesthetic. For Dubuffet, the delay in the emergence of the object evoked will intensify the surprise of revelation and identification: “I am convinced, moreover, that one gains by accumulating obstacles, that the more obstacles set up to keep the objects from appearing, the greater the shock when they do appear, just as the rebound of a spring will be all the more violent, the greater the pressure that has been exerted to compress it.”⁵⁹ This comment applies just as readily to *La botte à nique* as to his painting. Thus, as we have seen, when the reader opens the volume, he or she is confronted with a surface covered in signs that, although recognisable as letters, have been combined in such a way as to form new unrecognisable words, and her/his first task is to try to penetrate that linguistic barrier. When the anonymous voice of *La botte à nique* insists on the patience the gardener needs, it also

indirectly offers a tip to the reader who must decode the text. The very fact that the sense that emerges in the course of this elaborate *déchiffrement* appears to be so trite, is integral to the defamiliarisation: delayed recognition of the objects and activities described brings a new sharpened awareness of them. This delay of recognition also accounts for much of the humour of the text; as the reader resolves each linguistic conundrum, it gradually dawns on her/him that s/he may have been drawn into a hermeneutic game that will lead only to the revelation of what s/he knew already; and, as that thought dawns, s/he can either cast the book aside in irritation at time wasted or, marvel at the sheer impudence of the artist and acknowledge with self-directed irony the strength of the interpretative drive that will make her/him press on. Dubuffet seems to defy the reader to stop, wagering that, having started, s/he is more likely to finish than to stop in the middle.

However, Dubuffet's obstructive use of language is designed to defamiliarise not only the quotidian phenomena described but also language itself. Repeatedly in his aesthetic formulations he comments on the ways in which names cause the things they designate to "wither:" "We don't realize that when we name something, it scorches it as if it has been caught by an intense sun."⁶⁰ The purpose of his art is to challenge the accepted nomenclature, to force us to look properly at what is before us rather than to see what language tells us we see: "My approach works like a machine for abolishing the names of things, for knocking down the walls that the mind erects between different systems of objects, between different registers of facts and things [...]."⁶¹ So, in *La botte à nique*, the images around which the text is organised often look vaguely plant-like or bear a remote resemblance to a particular garden tool or container, but all of them resist clear identification. Likewise the language, by running words together, by coalescing syllables, by introducing unexpected breaks, challenges the integrity of the words that make up the lexicon of "standard" French. So, "Il faut" becomes "Ifo" (*passim*), "qu'on se" becomes "quonsse" (*passim*), "qu'ils aient froid" becomes

“quizéfroi” [6], “ce temps-là” becomes “stanla” [8], “l’eau de pluie” becomes “lodplui” [9], “il y a pas de quoi” becomes “iapadecoi” [18], “pays chauds” becomes “pé icho” [44], “des amourettes” becomes “dé za mouraite” [57].⁶² Repeatedly, the beginning and ending of words — which, as experiments conducted by cognitive scientists have shown,⁶³ are crucial to word-recognition — are embedded within new graphic formations. Moreover, in the more extreme cases, the readability of the new form is further reduced by splitting across two or more pages: so “de crocodiles” become “decrau-quodil” [102–4], while “des étagères” (“shelf-units”) becomes “dézai-tajaire” [69–71], the two parts of the new form separated by two pages devoted to images which inevitably distract the reader and make her/him retrace her/his steps.

The combination of words and syllables into new formations cleanses them of the “grime” that they have accumulated through unthinking use and invests them with new life:

I’ve come to think that we’ll only recover the sense of writing, I mean what is called writing, when we decide once and for all to play with the spelling of words, to change their gender, to exploit the sounds of words as the fancy takes us, occasionally joining two or three together, so that the words that are treated in this way (often little is needed, it is sometimes enough to cut or move a word), thereby suddenly stripped of their grime, as good as new, skip along merrily and full of life. [...] In short, a process running in parallel with my painting.⁶⁴

In fusing words and fragmenting others, Dubuffet not simply hinders recognition and access to “meaning,” but creates new signifiers that make us aware of the materiality of language, of the signs and the sounds that compose it, while, in forcing the reader to lend her/his voice to the text, he involves her/him both conceptually and physically in the work.⁶⁵ Dubuffet also

seeks to break the one-to-one relationship between word and referent, to disrupt the magnetic draw of the univocal in favour of a multiplicity of meanings and polyphony:

The trouble with thought, the thing that breaks its wings is the way in which it is constantly being drawn towards the univocal. This magnetic pull deadens it.

Polyphony frees it [...]. Thought operates on several tracks, which overlap and obstruct each other, and not on the single track to which traditional culture insists on confining it. We have to restore its multiplicity.⁶⁶

Moreover, the breaking-up of words and the recomposition of their parts into neologistic units follow the same principle as the assemblage he practised at various points in his life. And, indeed, in *La botte à nique*, the lexical rearrangements and recombinations are mirrored in the *Hourloupian* images that have been composed from the collage of fragments of newspaper and in which the original newsprint words are truncated, partially elided or combined into new graphic patterns.

The quasi-phonetic spellings of certain words is inconsistent across the volume, a variability that intensifies the difficulties we have in recognition and that further testifies to the ludic dimension of the text: having discovered that it is not sufficient to decipher a word once, but that we may encounter it in different guises elsewhere, we realise that we can take nothing for granted, that “knowledge” acquired at one stage in the text may offer little help at a later stage. Among the inconsistencies are found the following: “fer,” “ferre” and “fère” for “faire” (“to do”); “lé” and “lai” for “les” (“the”); “livaire” and “liver” for “l’hiver” (“winter”); “quec choze” “quecchose” and “quéquechauze” for “quelque chose” (“something”); “gèle” and “jaile” for “gèle[nt]” (“freeze(s)”); “metre” and “maitre” for “mettre” (“to put”); “trau” and “tro” for “trop” (“too”); “po” “pau” and “peau” for “pot[s]” (“pot(s)”); “grenne” and “grène” for “graine” (“seed”); “soire” and “souare” for “soir”

(“evening”). While these variations are to be read as instances of the many linguistic pranks that punctuate the volume, they also make a serious aesthetic point: by refusing the reader the basic coordinate of formal/orthographic consistency, they resist the habituation that comes with knowledge-acquisition and assimilation, promote the oral reconstruction of units or subvocalisation that is part of elementary reading instruction and inhibit the deployment of the anticipation and synthetic recognition strategies that accompany silent reading and help us to make sense of letter shapes and sequences.⁶⁷

Even more disconcerting — and amusing for the reader who enters into the spirit of the game Dubuffet is playing with her/him — are those moments in the text when, in the midst of a sequence of alien forms, one spots what appears to be a standard spelling of a common word (e.g. “pète,” “mou,” “serre,” “porte”). However, relief at finding a point of reference quickly turns to frustration as one tries to determine the preceding and following textual segments in ways that would fit with the sense or senses of the familiar word; only gradually does one realise that, in fact, one may be dealing with a “false friend” and, with that realisation, one finds oneself forced to suspend the meanings associated with a given group of letters and look again at the unfamiliar context in which that ostensibly familiar grouping is placed; only then realisation dawns that, in fact, these are not free-standing words, but are broadly phonetically spelled syllables of longer words or phrases that have been — wilfully and teasingly — broken up by a line break or by an image.⁶⁸ Thus, “blé” is part of “quirsan/blé” [20]; “pète” is part of “tron pète” [21]; “pignon” is part of “chan pignon,” [37]; “bien” and “futé” are part of “bien na futé” [49]; “mou” is part of “mou-yé” [60]; “serre” is part of “serre-feuille” [62]; “porte” is part of “nin-porte” [71]; “danse” is part of “dance casla” [74], “mare” is part of “mare-jolène” [80]; “pain” is “pain preunaile” [83]; “grain” is part of “grain gallé” [104].⁶⁹ Elsewhere, Dubuffet sets similar traps by playing upon homophones: “peau” [42], “eau” [62], “an” [4], “pouce” [24], “mètre” [11], “fer” [39] are in

fact quasi-phonetic spellings of “pot” (“pot”) “au” (“to the”), “en” (“in”), mettre” (“to put”); “faire” (“to do/make”),” while “pere” [60], and “paye” [81] turn out to be quasi-phonetic renderings of the near-homonyms “perd” and “paille.”⁷⁰ In some instances, the meaning never stabilises fully, and we are left with a point of graphic and semantic undecidability. Thus, on page [41], it is impossible to know for sure whether “mareché” is Dubuffetesque spelling for “marché” (“market”) or for “maraîcher” (“market-gardener”); the spelling suggests the latter, but context suggests that the former is more likely.⁷¹ Dubuffet repeatedly contrives to trip us up, encourages us to make assumptions that lead us away from, rather than towards resolution of ambiguity. However, the labour invested in following misleading clues has not been wasted; in the course of “worrying at” the problem passage, we have been forcefully reminded of the arbitrariness of the relationship between any particular combination of letters and its referential meaning, of the multivalence of the speech sounds we string together in order to produce sense orally, and of the constraining role played by context and collocation in the making and perception of meaning.

As the text advances, the reader’s “learning curve” steepens. For about the first third, the text refers to commonplace reality; gradually, more whimsical and fanciful comments begin to infiltrate, some of which seem to attribute volition to the plants; finally, from around page [78], the text veers off into a domain in which the everyday and the fantastic are juxtaposed, and the reader, who hitherto could rely on real world assumptions, now finds that the words that emerge are unfamiliar and that the phenomena they evoke do not correspond to known reality. On page [86], the text swings from a commonsensical remark about the ill-effects of hailstone (“sa ache tou ouque satonbe,” “it hacks down everything in its path”) to yet another list of plants; however, unlike earlier lists, this one consists almost exclusively of invented plants that are designated either by words that do not belong to the plant lexicon or semi-neologistic formations that deflect recognisable words from their usual senses: “ial

bouzingue ipouce sur lai oplato danlé nui sanlune ial grantauredu qué tanfaurme de tirbou-
 chon ial foutriqué a feuil caduc ialatra-pemouc-aire ial berlingo-tié ial janbonié cajoleure ia
 oci larbre manje mouche ial caman-bairetié fé aqueure ial quapitène avaique son plumé ai sé
 troi perdu moucetache frizé ofère son gran sabroclère” [89–92].⁷² When the list momentarily
 switches to recognisable botanical forms and terms (e.g. the “sôle pleureure”/ “weeping
 willow” [95]), the brief accompanying description immediately brings it back to the
 whimsical (the weeping willow “pleur come un vo,” “cries like a calf”), before resuming the
 list of invented plants whose names are determined as much by rhyme as by semantic
 association, the “sôle pleureure” engendering a series of rhyming “botanical” appellations
 including “lé fraire cabreure” (“the tumbling brothers”), “lédoi chatouyeure” (“the tickling
 fingers”), “lé gran tron-bonne cafouy-eure” (“the big chaotic trombones”) and the
 “candélabre” which “qua-rapate come un voleure” (“runs off like a thief,” [95–98]).⁷³ Thus,
 the text shifts from what appeared to be laborious descriptions of quotidian reality to flurries
 of fanciful forms that seemingly refer to bizarre organisms and creatures that merge the
 vegetable and the human.⁷⁴

Puzzling though this shift may be on first encounter, the reader who knows Dubuffet’s
 work will recognise it as yet another defamiliarising strategy, designed to blur the distinction
 between the categories by which we organise our world: “One aim throughout the entire
Hourloupe cycle is precisely to make the mind aware of the conventional nature of the way in
 which our world has been analysed and which governs our thinking, to call on our thinking to
 come up with a new, completely different way of carving it up, a new inventory, with new
 nomenclatures and a new vocabulary.”⁷⁵ In *La botte à nique*, as elsewhere, Dubuffet explores
 the liminal zone between the real and the fantastic. As he has repeatedly stated, the function
 of art is to counteract the normal functional perspective on the surrounding world and to
 destabilize the nomenclature or cultural grid through which we see it. Thus, in the *Hourloupe*

series to which *La botte à nique* belongs, the continuous serpentine line by which he maps out interlocking shapes is designed at one and the same time to suggest forms and to inhibit naturalisation and nomination of those forms.⁷⁶ In the text of *La botte à nique*, the sudden appearance of references to unfamiliar organisms and the interweaving of those references with the quotidian cannot be dismissed as one last prank designed to make further mischief with the reader; for all their whimsicality, these references are consonant with an aesthetic to which Dubuffet held fast throughout his career and which hinges on *dépaysement* (disorientation), equivocation and the fusion of the familiar with the marvellous and the strange:

Art generally has to mix the habitual and the familiar with the marvellous. Anything containing only the habitual has no art, and anything containing only the marvellous is really fairyland, it doesn't move us. We like to see a work combining the very real and the very strange (closely mixed).⁷⁷

I like to see life in difficulty, in turmoil, hesitating among certain forms that we recognise as belonging to our familiar surroundings and others that are totally foreign to it and whose voices surprise us.⁷⁸

Thus, the last third of *La botte à nique* presents in concentrated form an array of strange plants that can be seen as the near-relations of the many hybrid species and fused forms to be found elsewhere in Dubuffet's œuvre, while their equally strange names echo, in their morphological processes, many of the more outlandish titles that he gave to other works.⁷⁹

Moreover, the appearance of these fantastical elements also obeys a logic that is specific to *La botte à nique*, i.e. a linguistic logic. Although, on a first reading, these elements seem to erupt out of nowhere, they can in fact be seen as the products of an intricate process of linguistic patterning and generation that traverses the volume. Careful reading of

the decoded text reveals that the ostensibly random series of declarations which skip from one horticultural tip to another, from season to season and from fruit to vegetable to flower to shrub to tree and so on, is underpinned by an intricate, evolving structure based upon rhyme and the interweaving of series of words that have no semantic link, but that end with the same or similar sounds. Thus, analysis of the sound patterns of the language of *La botte à nique* reveals the following series of rhymes or near-rhymes:⁸⁰

Sound/ ending	Words/ phrases that figure in <i>La botte à nique</i>
-er/-é/-et [e]	<i>passim</i>
-au/-aud/-aut/-eau/- o/ -ot [o]	artichauts, bateaux, beau, bestiaux, chauds, coco, coquelicots, couteau, eau, faut, fayots, gigot, goulots, haricots, métro, morceaux, noyau, oiseaux, paletot, plateaux, poireaux, pot(s), rameaux, râteau, roseaux, sureau, terreau, tonneaux, tuyaux, veau, végétaux
-air/-aire/-ère/-erre/- er/-ers/-ert [ɛʀ]	air, Angleterre, cimetière, clair, couvert, dictionnaire, étagères, faire, fer, fougère, frères, gouttière, hiver, lierre, ménagères, ouvert, paire, parterre, poussière, première, rivières, sert, terre, travers, vers
-eur [œʀ]	ardeur, cabreurs, cafouilleurs, cajoleur, chatouilleurs, choux-fleurs, cœur, couleurs, fleurs, grandeur(s), hauteurs, heure(s), leur(s), meilleur, peur, pleure, pleureur, plusieurs, voleur
-i/-is/ -il/ -it/ -ui [i]	abattis, aussi, béni, dit, confettis, épis, gui, jolis, mis, oubli, persil, penderies, pie, pis, rabougris, réussit, tandis, vernis
-ette/-ête/-ête [ɛt]	achettent, allumettes, amourettes, bêtes, binette, clochettes, cornettes, fleurette, fourchette, noisette, prêtent, serpettes, topette, trompettes, violettes
-ain/-aint/-ein/-in/- oin [ɛ̃]	boulingrins, brin, crottin, foin(s), lapin, machin, mannequins, matin, moulins, pleins, rondins, sapin, terrain, toussaint
-a/-as/-at/-ac [ɑ] and [a]	bas, bégonias, cas, échalas, estomacs, Fatima, frésias, matelas, plat, tabac, réséda, soldats, tas (<i>also</i> ananas)
-ois/ -oit/ -oix/ -oigt/ -oient [wa]	bois, boit, croit, doigts, droit, fois, froids, nettoient, noix, soient, toits, voit, trois
-an/-and/-ant/-ent [ɑ̃]	autrement, battant, chiendent, forcément, glands, heureusement, justement, ouragan, souvent, tranquillement, vent, vraiment

-aile/-èle/-êle/-ël/-elle/ [ɛl]	ailes, s'appelle, ficelle, gamelles, gèle, grêle, mortelle, mêle, Noël, pelle, pimprenelle, quelle
-on/-ion [ɔ̃]	attention, bûcherons, champignons, cornichons, cresson, gazon, mourron, oignons, pucerons, saison, tirebouchon
-ier [je]	berlingotier, camembertier, fruitier, grainetier, jambonnier, jardinier, marronnier, palmier, papier, premier, osier
-ure [yʀ]	confitures, bordures, dur, figures, mur, postures, sur, verdure
-ène/-enne [ɛn]	capitaine, se démènent, graines, marjolène, peine, prennent, revienne
-ace/-as/-asse [as]	ananas, casse, grimace, face, limaces, place
-oup/-out [u]	beaucoup, bout, coup(s), pu, ou, où, tout
-our [uʀ]	autour, jour, tambour, toujours, tour, velours
-eu/-eut/-eux [ø]	ceux, feu, mieux, lieux, peu, peut, veut
-ule [yl]	bascule, gesticule, mandibule, tentacules, tubercules
-ice/-is/-isse [is]	fleurs de lice, maïs, pourrisse, réglisse, roussissent
-atte [at]	abattent, acrobates, se carapotent, patte, rate
-u/ -us/ -uë [y]	biscornu, ciguë, début, plus, remue, rue
-ar/-ard [aʀ]	boulevards, buvards, canard, gaillards, nénuphar
-ache [aʃ]	attache, bourrache, crachent, hache, moustaches
-uis/-uit [ɥi]	buis, cuit, fruit, nuit(s), pluie
-ique [ik]	boutiques, fariboliques, musique, nique
-ile/-ille/-yle [il]	carbonyle, crocodiles, difficile, ville
-ille [ije]	recroquevillent, tortillent

-bre [br]	arbre, candélabres, sabre
-anche [ãj]	blanches, se démanche, planches
-ec [ɛk]	avec, becs, secs
-euil/ -euille/-oeil [œj]	cerfeuil, feuilles, œil
-aille [aj]	paille, rempaille, travaille
-ence [ãs]	différence, patience, semence
-oir/ -oire [war]	foire, mâchoire, soir
-être/-ettre [ɛtr]	fenêtre, mettre
-ouche [uʃ]	bouche, mouche
-oule [ul]	boules, poules
-ousse [us]	mousse, pousse(nt)
-age [aʒ]	fourrage, sauvage
-ège [ɛʒe]	Norvège, piège
-ose/ -ause [oz]	chose, pause

With each reading, new linguistic features of Dubuffet's text come to the fore and, as the reader's attention shifts from signified to signifier, s/he discerns the extent to which the medium is determining the content. It becomes clear that, just as in his painting Dubuffet explores the suggestiveness of the materials and substances with which he works, so in *La botte à nique* phonetic association, rhyme and assonance are crucial to both the generation of the text and its unity. With the realisation that a given sequence of words or, indeed, a given

sequence of statements has been governed by phonological rather than semantic considerations and that the familiar sense-making strategies we normally bring to reading will offer limited purchase on *La botte à nique*, we become more attentive to the sounds and shapes of letter combinations on the page and more aware of phonic and graphic links between different parts of the volume. If the “reward” for our initial reading was the discovery of a text of crushing banality, the recompense for re-readings is much richer, for they reveal a wittily ludic and multi-layered discourse, whose surface diffuseness conceals an attentiveness to pattern and a tightly cohesive linguistic infrastructure.

Stocktaking, self-citation and reflexivity

Surveying Dubuffet’s long and prolific career, one is above all struck by the variety of his output, the distinctiveness of the series produced and the systematic way in which, through those series, he explored particular formal, thematic or technical concerns. Dubuffet’s œuvre is vast, the pace of the work schedule he followed was relentless, and he frequently juggled several quite different projects simultaneously. Yet, despite that incessant activity and the proliferation of large-scale undertakings, he was bent on keeping control over all aspects of his creations from conception, through execution and exhibition, to their final cataloguing by scholars whose labour he vigilantly monitored. Even the analysis of his work was not exempt from his intervention. Symptomatic of that desire for control are the various projects punctuating the latter part of his career which can be read as attempts to take stock and synthesise.⁸¹ Thus, the *Closerie* and *Villa Falbala* (1971–1973), the “tableau animé” *Coucou Bazar* (1971–1973), the *Théâtres de mémoire* (1975–1978), and the publication of the *Prospectus et tous écrits suivants*, of the *Catalogue des travaux de Jean Dubuffet* and of *Biographie au pas de course*, written shortly before his death, are all indicative of a wish to

manage reception and of an increasingly regular tendency towards retrospective review and reflection. *La botte à nique* can be regarded as a kind of Dubuffet “compendium” that, even as it seemingly dispenses prosaic garden tips, refers both directly and obliquely to many of Dubuffet’s most typical motifs, to materials he used, to his techniques and to his aesthetic principles. The final section of this article will consider the evidence to support a reading of *La botte à nique* as a reflexive work of synthesis.

On the level of motifs, *La botte à nique* — through its detailed comments on gardening, its references to tools, trees and items of furniture, and its incorporation of words and phrases that figure in the titles of paintings, sculptures or publications — alludes both to series and individual works from almost every period of Dubuffet’s career until 1973. Most obviously, *La botte à nique* reminds the reader of the occasional representations of gardeners and planters and the very many “jardins” and other “botanical” subjects painted or sculpted in the course of his life, from the assemblages of 1956 (notably *Routes et Chaussées* and *Jardins*) to the butterfly-wing *Jardins* of 1955, to the *Hourloupe*-cycle works *Jardin d’hiver* (1968–1970), the *Jardin d’email* (1968–1974) and the *Closerie Falbala*.⁸² Similarly, the various trees, shrubs and plants that are mentioned in *La botte à nique* echo the vegetation that appears in various shapes and forms throughout his career, in particular in *Herbes*, *Charrettes*, *Terres Herbeuses* (1955), *Eléments botaniques* (1959), and, of course, the *Hourloupe* cycle, with its trademark polystyrene trees,⁸³ while the reference to “palm-trees in hot countries” [44] is surely a nod to the many palm-trees and groves drawn and painted during and following his stays in the Sahara in the late forties.⁸⁴

And, of course, Dubuffet was himself a passionate gardener or, at least, a passionate organiser of gardens. His interest in matters botanical is well-documented in his writing and correspondence and in the comments of those who knew him. The clearest manifestation of this interest was the gardens complex he established during the time spent in Vence (1955–

57) which comprised five plots: three horizontal, one vertical, running the length of a four-metre wall, which was “the pearl of my domains,” and one very large sloping garden with mounds “that take one back to the sand-castles stage.”⁸⁵ Throughout his stay in Vence, he maintained his intense work pace and productivity, while also embarking upon an ambitious building project — the construction of a studio — which proved to be time-consuming and fraught with problems. Nevertheless, the making of his gardens was a constant concern and figured prominently in letters and other writings from the period. These documents give progress reports, recount plant-collecting forays into the countryside, and describe the contribution made by the botanist Philippe Dereux.⁸⁶ Visitors retain vivid impressions of the gardens: André Vialatte recalls in amused terms Dubuffet’s concern for his couch-grass,⁸⁷ while, thirty years later, in his correspondence with Thévoz, Dereux recounts in detail the time he spent with the artist, describing the painter’s pleasure in learning the names of the indigenous wild plants, his interest in the herbarium Dereux had assembled in his adolescence, the boulders, clumps of plants and large quantities of earth that the artist transported from the col de Vence, his obstinately pursued ambition to create, against the odds, a garden at L’Uzac and his disregard of all contrary advice.⁸⁸ Dubuffet’s enthusiasm for botany and gardening is also regularly expressed in his correspondence and writing at other times. In the Sahara in 1947, he spent entire mornings watching gardeners fertilizing palm-trees.⁸⁹ He tells Paulhan that Charles Ratton is “quite a good botanist.”⁹⁰ In a 1979 letter to Jacques Berne, he complains about aphids on his gardenias and sparrows eating his carnations.⁹¹ A little over a month before his death, he writes to Berne lamenting the sorry state of his Paris garden and, in particular, of his camelias and wishes he could transplant a billiard-table-size piece of mountain turf from Vence to Paris.⁹²

If *La botte à nique* has precedents in Dubuffet’s formal artistic output and in his private, more “domestic” activities, the decision to produce a book of words and images that

is, ostensibly, about gardening, must also be seen in a broader context. The garden holds a privileged place in painting, literature, religion and mythology, and *La botte à nique* inevitably calls to mind the vast body of associations that, since antiquity, have developed around the garden as symbolic space and the processes of its creation and maintenance. In choosing such a symbolically loaded topic for the Skira volume and in treating it in such an apparently literalist manner, Dubuffet can, of course, be seen as directing a subversive potshot at high art and its excluding encoding practices. However, at the same time, he is also tapping into the time-honoured association between gardening and artistic creation and, indeed, playing his own related hermeneutic games with the reader.

In *La botte à nique*, Dubuffet offers a new twist on the association between gardening and creation, exploiting the trope in order, in particular, to express in a comically circuitous manner the key roles played in his work by chance and the unexpected. In his discursive texts and interviews, Dubuffet repeatedly highlights the exploratory nature of the artistic enterprise, stressing chance's part in the production of a given composition and the fact that the outcome of that process is often very different from what he had initially envisaged:

But almost invariably when I start to work, what emerges is something quite different from what I had envisaged.⁹³

The journeys that can be anticipated in the practice of painting are journeys whose destinations are not known in advance. You book a ticket without knowing where you're going.⁹⁴

However, Dubuffet's is an aesthetic of controlled chance insofar as the artist acts upon and responds to the physical properties and constraints of his materials: "The artist is not pitted against just any kind of chance, but against a particular kind, one that fits the nature of the material employed."⁹⁵ In *La botte à nique*, this idea translates into various related repetitive

and largely self-evident gardening “tips” in which he explains that (a) the gardener needs to be patient [15]; (b) sometimes the process works and sometimes it doesn’t [17]; (c) when one plants a seed, sometimes nothing comes up, but there is no point of “making a meal of it” [18]; and (d) that, sometimes, what emerges from the ground is quite different from expectation [18–19]. With regard to the last eventuality, Dubuffet informs — with typical, humorous, anecdotal convolutions and digressions — that he repeatedly asked his seed-merchant about this and that the latter explained that “it depends on how it is planted” and that “sometimes they mix up the packets. That can happen” [21]. Dubuffet proceeds to corroborate these gems of wisdom with personal anecdotes (once he planted lettuce and all that grew was a “a clump of dried grass that looked like nothing on earth” [22]; sometimes you get “confettis” or “sorts of trumpets” [20–21], before resuming the seed-merchant’s explanations (“the ground isn’t suitable” or “they may have used the wrong packet” [21–22]) and adding some supplementary clarifications of his own to the effect that plants have “pieds” or stocks and then, at the top, the foliage, that some curl round, that some trail and some climb, and that, of course, you also have all the big trees with monkeys in them that give shade in summer [22–28]. While the reader who is attuned to Dubuffet’s humour finds much to amuse in his combination of wordy and repetitive statements of the obvious with less predictable explanations regarding the incompetence of commercial seed suppliers, these pages also make a serious point: for every project, whether it be gardening or the production of an artwork, one is working with a set of basic givens, i.e. seed, bulbs, earth, manure etc. or the various materials used by the painter/ sculptor. If, by virtue of their particular properties, these givens impose constraints, they are also full of potential; thus, the gardener whose seeds result in grass or weeds instead of an anticipated floral display should perhaps, like Dubuffet, learn to see the particular qualities of the resulting crop rather than “crying over” her/his disappointment, while the artist must not only accept that, sometimes, “it’s a flop” (“ça

foire,” [17]), but be ready to exploit the potential inherent in his materials and the associations generated by them; if he does so, then he may produce something that is not only different, but better than what he had envisaged: “I’ve always found that a piece of work will only really please me if it incorporates effects that I had not intended, if it looks to me like something that hasn’t been made by me.”⁹⁶

While *La botte à nique* most obviously references Dubuffet’s domestic and artistic “jardins,” the book also contains a number of other more discreet allusions to recurring motifs in his work, as well as to some of the materials that he incorporated into it. The references to tools, utensils, items of furniture, parts of buildings, and various other domestic items (bottles, vases, flower-pots, candelabra) can all be read as textual nods to other works — in particular, the tools, utensils, *meubles*, windows, walls and household items that recur in particular across the *Hourloupe* cycle, but also elsewhere.⁹⁷ Similarly, the references to musical instruments and to natural elements other than vegetation (the moon, birds, wind, shadow, heathland) recall Dubuffet’s *Expériences musicales* (*Musical Experiments*) from 1961,⁹⁸ as well as paintings featuring musical instruments and musicians, birds and other natural phenomena, or works whose titles refer to them,⁹⁹ while the reference to dance [105] reminds the reader of Dubuffet’s frequent use of dancing as a metaphor for artistic creation, as well as the various paintings, sculptures and lithographs of “dancers” and, of course, the “animated painting” *Coucou Bazar*.¹⁰⁰

In addition, there are echoes of the titles of his work scattered throughout the volume¹⁰¹ and, at one point, he appears to allude to the title of an earlier volume that brought together three of his *jargon* texts.¹⁰² There are phonic echoes of the word “Hourloupe” in the suddenly introduced “wolf-traps” (“pièges à loup,” [38]) and the “fasse alou-ragon jurle ovan” [95–96] (“in the face of the hurricane I howl at the wind”),¹⁰³ the first of these expressions can also be read as an indirect reference to the many traps set for his readers,

while the second illustrates again the importance of rhyme in the elaboration of the text.¹⁰⁴

The title *La botte à nique* is, of course, itself echoed in the “musique”—“faribolique”—“boutique” series but, like so many of Dubuffet’s titles, it also involves wordplay, recalling not only the various meanings of the multivalent “botte” (meaning “bunch” or “sheaf,” “boot,” “thrust,”), but also the expression “faire la nique à,” i.e. “to cock a snook at” as well as the abbreviated and vulgar slang variation on “forniquer” (“niquer”). Alongside references to familiar motifs and self-conscious punning, *La botte à nique* mentions a range of materials or substances — man-made and natural — that Dubuffet used as surfaces or tools (paper, knife) or that he incorporated into his work (string, wood, straw, dust, roots, leaves, ferns and other vegetable matter). Among the more pointed allusions to found materials, one might cite the description of the work of the gardener [53] who, among other tasks, picks up various detritus (waste paper, billy-cans, métro tickets), as well as the botanical “tip” on page [57] informing the reader that s/he can dry flowers in a dictionary “ansouvnire de za mouraite,” and perhaps even the reference to the “camembairétié” on page [92]: it is well documented that Dubuffet regularly incorporated into his works various sorts of detritus including métro tickets, camembert boxes, and vegetable matter scavenged from the “piles of refuse” at the Halles,¹⁰⁵ the reference to the métro tickets also recalling his paintings and drawings of the Métro (1943, 1949), and the collaborative volume he produced with Jean Paulhan, *La Métromanie*.¹⁰⁶

The passage recounting the reactions of the seed-merchant also illustrates another of the volume’s reflexive features: i.e. the way in which it mimics the ramifying patterns formed by the roots, branches, offshoots and suckers of the plants it describes and by the *Hourloupe* line itself. If the occasional references to forms that twist and turn, that wind and loop back on themselves can be seen as allusions to the *Hourloupe* line, its sinuous movement is also replicated in the text’s flow and rhythms. By its deployment of various linguistic devices, *La*

botte à nique works against the normal uni-directional linearity of language. In particular, the use of repetition, reprise with variation and refrains that recur over part or all of the volume creates textual loops that constantly bring the subject and the reader back to earlier topics and points in the discourse. The initial pages exemplify very clearly this pattern. Opening with a declarative, but circular sentence revolving around the word “biner”(“to hoe”) and “binette” (“hoe”), the text seems to get stuck in a linguistic loop, before branching out, by a lateral shift from “binette,” to a near-synonym (“pelle”, “shovel”/”spade”) and then broadening the options (“otchoze pour lé rassine”, “something else for the roots”) and moving on to a new linguistic group relating to propagation (“tubercul”, “tubers”; “zognon”, “bulbs,” “cemence”, “seed” [3–5]). This allows the initiation and establishment of a new sequence based on the seed-merchant, his shop on the rue du Bec and his multifarious wares, the introduction of the “pots de fleurs” that he sells, nevertheless, allowing Dubuffet to return to the fact that plants need water (already mentioned on the first page) which will become the most frequently recurring refrain of the whole book.¹⁰⁷ The text then makes a lateral move, alerting the reader to the dangers of frost for certain plants, the need to pamper them, and the importance of patience, before embarking on a whimsical digression which helpfully advises on the various things the gardener can do while s/he waits for the plants to emerge: one learns that one can go for a walk, do some DIY or just take a rest. Following a few more reminders about watering plants and obvious advice on staking, the text turns to the pleasant surprises of gardening and returns to the seed-merchant. Similarly, the various series of rhyming words, the use of homonyms and of assonance and the ludic spelling variations discussed earlier all create intratextual and infra-textual links and echoes, thereby ensuring that the reader, once alerted to this textual pattern, constantly revisits previously deciphered pages in order to locate earlier occurrences of a particular ending, sound or word.

Finally, in this analysis of the reflexive and retrospective dimensions of *La botte à nique*, we should consider briefly the role played by newspaper in both the collage forms and as a background. While these pages of the volume inevitably reference the pioneering *papiers collés* of Picasso, Braque and Gris, as well as the collages and assemblages of Futurism and Dada, the incorporation of segments of newspaper here also takes the viewer back almost to the beginning of Dubuffet's career and his 1944 *Messages* in which brief communications such as one might find pinned on a door, in graffiti, on a postcard or in a telegram have been hastily scribbled in india ink across a segment of newspaper,¹⁰⁸ Dubuffet already showing in these early works an awareness of the suggestive potential of the decontextualized and defamiliarised commonplace. Moreover, the tension between the different discourses and the effacement of much of the newspaper text, by promoting the spoken, the handwritten and the personalised over the printed, the standardised and the impersonal,¹⁰⁹ might be construed as anticipating much of what was to follow and, in particular, the *jargon* texts. In *La botte à nique* the newspaper articles and adverts have not been obliterated, but they have been cut up and pasted together to form collages or have been partially concealed by other collage elements. These practices serve various purposes. The juxtaposition of different fonts, the truncation of words and the presentation of letters at different angles foreground the materiality of language. The fragmentation of both individual words and longer passages works against the linearity of language and allows the artist to isolate words or syllables with a particular resonance. Thus, the clearly legible “jeux” in the second newspaper collage [6] and the “jouer” on page [49] alert the reader to the ludic nature of what is to follow, while the “journaux” on page [11] not only serves as a marker of self-referentiality (figure 3), but might also be read as an allusion to the many truncations of the word “Journal” in the Cubist work of Picasso, Braque and Gris and, in particular, the famous “JOU” of Picasso's seminal *Still Life with Chair Caning* (1912).¹¹⁰ The “CULTURE” on page [42], which, although partly

obliterated, is readily reconstructed, is a double-edged reference both to the “high culture” Dubuffet so frequently attacks and the (literally) earthier “culture” that he is — ostensibly — describing in *La botte à nique* and has represented in so many compositions. Within the collages, one finds in the truncated words echoes of several of the most common “rhymes” which, we have seen, are important drivers in Dubuffet’s text.¹¹¹ Even some of the proper names that remain legible have a reflexive dimension: it seems likely that Dubuffet left intact and visible the name “Christodoulou” because it recalls “loup” and “hourloupe,” while the isolation of “Kafka” on page [11] warns of the labyrinthine journey that we are undertaking (figure 3).¹¹² Here, part of a page from *Le Monde*, that has been turned about 105 degrees, serves as the surface for a *Hourloupian* collage and for Dubuffet’s writing. Via the interplay among printed surface, collage and the handwritten text, the artist establishes a tension between the agitation of human history as represented in the ephemeral traces of newsprint and the unrushable natural cycle as represented by the plant-like collage elements and his own deliberately paced text, a tension reinforced by the emphatically defined and tightly integrated, blank *Hourloupian* forms and the partial sheet of newspaper which, though covered in signs has, through truncation and overwriting, lost its capacity to communicate information. Lastly, the fact that, here, as on pages [2], [6], [7], [12], [30], [41], [42], [43], [49], the reader/ viewer has to rotate the volume in order to decipher the visible segments of newspaper accentuates the contrast between the large flowing forms of Dubuffet’s handwritten text and the close-packed, standardised and angular letters of the newsprint, draws attention to the status of the *La botte à nique* as a physical object demanding consideration from different angles and active physical involvement on the part of the reader/ viewer, and highlights the shape-changing qualities of the *Hourloupe* forms which, as they are rotated, appear to shift and alter and prompt different associations according to the direction of the page.¹¹³

La botte à nique is a work of many layers that demands of the reader not only repeated readings, but also the mobilisation of various decoding procedures — visual, linguistic, literal, metaphorical, biographical and cultural. Like all Dubuffet's work, it makes us look again at everyday things that we take for granted and the words we use to describe them and to classify our different modes of interaction with them. In choosing to write a pseudo-manual of botany, Dubuffet focuses our attention on an activity — cultivation — that is fundamental to the evolution of human history and to man's engagement with and ordering of his world, as well as on the basic, timeless gestures associated with that activity for thousands of years. At the same time — and despite his anticultural declarations — he invokes implicitly the metaphorical sense of the word “culture” and the central and complex role the garden has played in mythology, religion, literature and art. The apparent linguistic rebarbateness of *La botte à nique* simply camouflages its sophistication; close analysis not only reveals the acuity of Dubuffet's linguistic awareness and his understanding of the mechanisms of spoken French, but also highlights the many questions the volume raises about the ways in which we read texts and images, about the relationships between the written and the spoken word, between text and image, between the handwritten and the printed, and among the heard, the read and the vocalised; not least, it makes us aware of the role played by the body in reading, rereading and, indeed, the cognitive processing of texts and images. Contrary to the ostensible diffuseness of its free-running and ahierarchical, paratactic syntax, its loose lists and abruptly introduced incongruities, *La botte à nique* is a tightly constructed work in which the recursive text mimics the *Hourloupe* line, in which truncation and collage transform words into images and whose discourse, as it shifts from the apparent orderliness and literalness of the gardening tips to the neologistic opacity and ludic play of the final pages, maps out the tension inherent in Dubuffet's work between *vérisme*

and fantasy. As the product of a process involving artisanal methods (the hand-written text, the collages of the maquette) and the professional printing resources of a prestigious publishing house, *La botte à nique* plays on the paradoxical status of the print as “écart” (“gap”/ “distance”), what Georges Didi-Huberman calls its “double condition,” at once the product of contact and separation, both presence and absence, unique and reproduced, simultaneously offering and denying access to the artist (via his handwriting) and his materials (e.g. the various types of paper used).¹¹⁴ Full of platitudes that have to be decoded and that are delivered in a deadpan minimalist style, of refrains that restate the obvious, of visual puns and homonymic play, of “false friends” and spelling inconsistencies that almost invariably catch us out, driven in part by rhyme and assonance that work against syntagmatic logic, taking the form of an extended riddle and yet, simultaneously, exemplifying some of Dubuffet’s most fundamental aesthetic principles, *La botte à nique* is at once a highly humorous and a deeply serious enterprise.¹¹⁵ Moreover, it can be read as a work of synthesis, full of winks and nods to earlier works and symptomatic of a will to stock-take that is evident in much of his work from the late sixties onwards. However — and this is another key paradox here — if the retrospective dimension of the volume, combined with its intricate linguistic, figurative and allusive encoding, might suggest a will to control reception, *La botte à nique* also demands that the reader/ viewer becomes a co-creator. Without the latter’s active intellectual *and* physical involvement, the text of *La botte à nique* is at best “the wild imaginings of a senile gardener,” at worst nicely handwritten nonsense. For the sense or rather many senses of these “ravings” to be realised, the reader/ viewer must engage creatively with it; and in so doing, s/he will learn a great deal not only about Dubuffet’s art, but also something about her/his own processes of perception and cognition.

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² Jean Dubuffet, *Asphyxiante culture* (Paris: Minuit, 1968); Dubuffet, *Prospectus et tous écrits suivants*, ed. Hubert Damisch, 4 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1967–1995), hereafter abbreviated as *Prospectus*.

³ *Catalogue des travaux de Jean Dubuffet*, Fascicules I–XXXVIII (Paris: Pauvert/Weber/Minuit/ Fondation Jean Dubuffet, 1965–). From 1965 until 1979, the *Catalogue des travaux de Jean Dubuffet* was edited by Max Loreau; thereafter, it was edited by Jean Dubuffet with assistance from Armande de Trentinian and the Fondation Dubuffet ; the Fondation Dubuffet also undertakes updates and reprints. References to the *Catalogue des travaux* will take the form of *Catalogue* followed by volume number and illustration number. For the correspondence, see, in particular, Jean Dubuffet *Prospectus* and *Lettres à J.B.* (Paris: Hermann, 1991). See also *Jean Dubuffet–Jean Paulhan, Correspondance 1944–1968*, edited by Julien Dieudonné and Marianne Jakobi (Paris: Gallimard, 2003); hereafter abbreviated as *Dubuffet–Paulhan*.

⁴ *Prospectus*, I, 94–100 and 203–24.

⁵ Jean Dubuffet, *Ler dla campane, par Dubufe J.* (Paris: L'Art brut, 1948); Dubuffet, *Anvouaija par in ninbesil avec de zimaje* (Paris: Chez l'auteur, 1950); Dubuffet, *Labonfam abeber, par inbo nom* (Paris: Chez l'auteur, 1950); Dubuffet, *Plu kifékler mouinkon nivoua*,

par Dubuffe Jan (Saint-Maurice-d'Etelan: L'Air du temps, 1950); Dubuffet, *Oukiva trèné sèbot* par Jandu Bufe (Paris: Collège de Pataphysique, 1958); Dubuffet, *Vignettes Lorgnettes* (Bâle: Beyeler, 1962); *Couinque* (Alès: P.A. Benoît, 1963); Dubuffet, *L'Hourloupe*, *Le Petit Jésus*, n°10 (Paris: Noël Arnaud, 1963); Dubuffet, *La botte à nique* (Genève: Albert Skira, 1973); Dubuffet, *Bonpiet beau neuille* (Paris: Jeanne-Bucher, 1983; Marseille : Editions Ryôan-Ji, 1984). A free translation of “jargon” would be “gibberish”; however, Dubuffet is also referring to its sense as the secret language of criminals and marginals. It seems likely that, in explicitly describing these as *textes en jargon*, Dubuffet was also alluding to François Villon’s *Ballades en jargon* (see François Villon, *Ballades en jargon (y compris celles du ms de Stockholm)*, ed. and trans. André Lanly (Paris: Champion, 1971)).

⁶ “Dubuffet: The Nutcracker,” trans. Laura Harwood Wittman, in “Boundaries: Writing & Drawing,” special issue, ed. M. Reid, *Yale French Studies* 84 (1994): 198–221 (originally published as “Dubuffet le casseur de noix,” *Détournement d’écriture* (Paris: Minuit, 1989), 25–44). Brigitte Bardelot’s unpublished doctoral thesis includes two sections on Dubuffet, one of which offers a perceptive, if rather general discussion of certain features of his *jargon* texts (*Jargon et écriturisme: hétérodoxies dans la création poétique et picturale*, Université d’Aix-Marseille I, 1993).

⁷ Jean Dubuffet, *Biographie au pas de course* in *Prospectus*, IV, 457–538, p. 461.

⁸ Further information can be found as follows: Dubuffet’s interest in Egyptology and pre-Columbian culture (“Biographie au pas de course,” *Prospectus*, IV, 457–538 and 647–67, p. 477), his attempts to learn Arabic and Tifinagh (“Biographie au pas de course,” 490; *Dubuffet–Paulhan*, 476–77) and his study of the vernacular Latin of Terence and Gregory of Tours (“Biographie au pas de course,” 481, 653).

⁹ “Dubuffet: The Nutcracker,” 200. Where available, I shall use published translations; otherwise, translations are my own. The original version and reference will be given in the

accompanying note, as here: “A l’origine de l’activité littéraire de Dubuffet, il y a donc l’utopie, ou l’‘uglossie,’ comme disent les linguistes, c’est-à-dire la croyance en une langue première, pré-babélique, phylogénétiquement antérieure à la loi du Père, indemne par conséquent de toute instance du pouvoir, langue maternelle, enfantine au sens étymologique du terme [...]. La logophobie affichée à l’égard des langues qu’on dit si improprement naturelles est toujours l’envers d’une logophilie éperdue, polarisée par un fantasme intra-utérin de fusion interpersonnelle, d’immédiateté, d’unicité, de totalité, de communion ineffable” (*Détournement d’écriture*, 27).

¹⁰ “Dubuffet: The Nutcracker,” 212; “réactive la généalogie libidinale de l’expression verbale et l’origine excrémentielle des concepts” (*Détournement d’écriture*, 27).

¹¹ Yannick Chevalier, “‘Monumental et irrécusable’ : l’écrit en jargon de Jean Dubuffet,” in *Écrire la rupture*, ed. Christine Quéffelec and René-Pierre Colin (Tusson: Université Lumière-Lyon 2 and Editions Du Lérot, 2003), 37–60.

¹² Chevalier, “‘Monumental et irrécusable’” (39); “‘jargon absolu’, c’est-à-dire formé de mots inventés et dont la signification est problématique” (*Prospectus*, I, 487).

¹³ See Brigitte Bardelot, *André Martel: du jargon comme l’un des beaux-arts* (Nice: Rom, 1998).

¹⁴ See Shelley Cordulack, “Dubuffet and the Word Made Flesh,” *Word & Image* 10, no. 4, (1994): 311–342; Michel Ragon, “Jean Dubuffet, sa relation aux écrivains libertaires,” in *Dubuffet: conférences & colloques* ed. Hubert Damisch (Paris: Jeu de Paume, 1992), 36–42; Kent M. Minturn, *Contre-Histoire: The Postwar Art and Writings of Jean Dubuffet*, unpublished PhD. thesis, Columbia University, 2007, 91–97, 250–57; Caroline Perret, “Dubuffet, Fautrier and Ponge: Recognition of the “Other” as Intellectual Resistance in Art and Poetry in the War against Fascist Oppression,” *French Cultural Studies* 22, no. 3 (2011): 197–206; Sandrine Thiry, “Michaux et Dubuffet, rencontre de deux hommes du commun,” in

Henri Michaux: Corps et savoir, ed. Pierre Grouix and Jean-Michel Maulpoix (Paris: E.N.S., 1998), 297–324.

¹⁵ In her study *Jean Dubuffet et la fabrique du titre* (Paris: CNRS, 2006), Marianne Jakobi reports that Dubuffet had copies of Pinget's *Graal Flibuste* and *Le Renard et la boussole* in his library (155). Between 1980 and 1985, Dubuffet also kept notebooks recording his comments on the authors he read, including Raymond Roussel, Pinget and Valère Novarina (Jakobi, *Jean Dubuffet et la fabrique du titre*, 160–61). *Prospectus*, III (273–85) contains extracts from these notebooks including comments on Pinget's *L'Apocryphe*. See also his correspondence with Pinget and with Novarina, his preface to Novarina's *Le Drame de la vie* (*Prospectus*, III, 269–70), and his correspondence with Berne (*Lettres à J.B.*, 361).

¹⁶ See Cordulack, “Dubuffet and the Word Made Flesh”; Ragon, “Jean Dubuffet, sa relation aux écrivains libertaires”; Valérie Valembois, “Raymond Queneau – Jean Dubuffet: une rencontre esthétique” and “Raymond Queneau – Jean Dubuffet, les fous littéraires: les artistes fous,” *Cahiers Raymond Queneau*, 2 (2012): 33–46 and 47–61. According to Jakobi, Queneau and Céline figure most prominently in Dubuffet's library (*Jean Dubuffet et la fabrique du titre*, 152). See too the many references to Céline in his correspondence with Jean Paulhan and his short essay “Céline pilote,” *Prospectus*, II, 46–53. Fruitful comparisons might also be drawn with the fiction of Henri Calet who was a regular visitor to Dubuffet's home in Vence and whom the latter and Paulhan helped to support financially (see *Dubuffet–Paulhan*, 418).

¹⁷ *Prospectus*, I, 481–84.

¹⁸ Raymond Queneau, *Bâtons, chiffres et lettres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965, first published 1950), 11–26. The second is Queneau, “Ecrit en 1955,” *ibid.*, 65–94.

¹⁹ “Pour les textes en jargon [Queneau] omet de mentionner qu'ils ont précédé l'emploi fait par lui-même d'écriture phonétique et qu'ils sont (à ce que je crois du moins) à l'origine de

cet emploi. C'est pourtant de lui un petit larcin qui m'a fort contrarié. Mais bon; écrivons"
(*Lettres à J.B.*, 152).

²⁰ *Prospectus*, III, 478.

²¹ *Lettres à J.B.*, 45.

²² "la police de la culture," "les professeurs," "la caste bourgeoise," "l'intellectuel" who is
"un grand mâcheur d'idées." See *Asphyxiante culture*, 12, 7, 13, 10; "Art Brut préféré aux arts
culturels," *Prospectus*, I, 198–202, p. 199. See also Jean Dubuffet, "Art Brut preferred to the
Cultural Arts," trans. Joachim Neugroschel, in Mildred Glimcher, *Jean Dubuffet: Towards an
alternative reality* (New York: Pace and Abbeville, 1987), 101–104, p. 101; *Lettres à J.B.*,
102–103, 256; *Dubuffet–Paulhan*, 572.

²³ "qui nous paraissent avec les normes de la littérature usuelle dans le même rapport que les
ouvrages d'art brut avec ceux des arts culturels" ("La Compagnie de l'Art Brut," *Prospectus*,
I, 167–72, p. 172). Compare his letter to Jean Paulhan from 17 November 1948 (*Dubuffet–
Paulhan*, 564) and his delight in the letters he received from Ben Yahia, the camel herder he
met in Algeria in 1947 (*ibid.*, 382). For a discussion of Dubuffet's conception of the
relationship between *art brut* and *écriture brute*, see Céline Delavaux, *L'Art Brut, un
fantasme de peintre. Jean Dubuffet et les enjeux d'un discours* (Paris: Palette, 2010), 286–91;
Minturn, *Contre-Histoire: The Postwar Art and Writings of Jean Dubuffet*, 157–211.

²⁴ I propose this figure tentatively, since it is not always possible to distinguish between
images formed of more than one element and free-standing images.

²⁵ *Prospectus*, III, 476.

²⁶ "quelque chose qui ferait peut-être l'affaire," (*Prospectus*, IV, 318).

²⁷ Jakobi et Dieudonné, *Dubuffet*, 414–16.

²⁸ "C'est plutôt, vous verrez, du genre irrecevable" (*Prospectus*, IV, 318).

²⁹ “de mettre au service de sa subversion logologique le prestige de la collection” (Jakobi et Dieudonné, *Dubuffet*, 415).

³⁰ “le pied de nez du cancre à l’institution qui l’accueille” (Jakobi et Dieudonné, *Dubuffet*, 415).

³¹ “Sans doute que la création, où elle s’ébat le mieux, c’est au stade où ses sentiers ne sont pas encore frayés. Sitôt qu’ils le sont la voici qui commence à se regarder faire et ce n’est pas très sain pour elle. Après les sentiers viennent bientôt les boulevards et ceux-ci conduisent droit aux dénaturations et aux embaumements. Ce qui lui convient le mieux, à la création, c’est, je crois, les fourrés et pas de sentiers du tout, ou alors des sentiers bien indiscernables, soupçonnées d’elle seule, voire oubliés d’elle-même, et pas de boulevards surtout, et surtout, surtout pas d’esplanades. Elle ne respire plus du tout sur les esplanades, où pourtant on s’entête à toujours la porter (dans la bonne pensée de la donner mieux à voir),” (*Prospectus*, III, 475).

³² “Entraîner avec force l'esprit hors des sillons où il chemine habituellement” (“Notes pour les fins-lettrés,” *Prospectus*, I, 54–88, p. 78). The fact that Skira was the publisher of *Minotaure* which had published material on children’s drawings, the work of the insane, graffiti, and spiritualist messages may have been a factor in Dubuffet’s decision (see Jakobi and Dieudonné, *Dubuffet*, 146).

³³ The fact that he refers to it directly in his *Biographie au pas de course* also suggests that he attached more importance to it than Jakobi and Dieudonné claim (*Prospectus*, IV, 528).

³⁴ In addition to the soft-cover copies of *La botte à nique*, Skira also produced a deluxe, limited edition (200 copies) and a classic, leather-bound edition of 1000 copies. I shall be using the more widely available soft-cover version in this article.

³⁵ See pp. [26-27], [50-51], [58-59], [72-73], [88-89].

³⁶ *Lettres à J.B.*, 99.

³⁷ Rodney Ball, *Colloquial French Grammar: A Practical Guide* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000); Pierre Guiraud, *Le Français populaire* (Paris: PUF, 1965); Françoise Gadet, *Le Français populaire* (Paris: PUF, 1992); Nigel Armstrong, *Social and Stylistic Variation in Spoken French: A Comparative Approach* (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2001).

³⁸ For example, “coman qui” [6]/“comanc sé” [20] (“comment qu’ils,” “comment que c’est”), “pourcoic” [18] (“pourquoi que”), “malgré con di” [34] (“malgré qu’on dit”), “suivanque sé” [78] (“suivant que c’est”).

³⁹ “lé fleure dan lé vase ifo leure changé lo” [56–57] (“Les fleurs dans les vases il faut leur changer l’eau”); “la diféranse dé zarbre davaique lé zerbe séqui son” [33] (“la différence des arbres d’avec les herbes c’est qu’ils sont”), “cante sé quia bocou darbre sa sapaile” [37] (“quand c’est qu’il y a beaucoup d’arbres ça s’appelle”), “dan zuneplante squi iadabore pour comansé iale pié” [22] (“dans une plante ce qu’il y a d’abord pour commencer il y a le pied”), “ski ia oci sé la rubarbe” [33] (“ce qu’il y a aussi c’est la rhubarbe”), “sai suretou surlai ôteure danlai couin sovaje que pairesone iva” [100–101] (“c’est surtout sur les hauteurs dans les coins sauvages que personne y va”).

⁴⁰ “lé vieil feuil sadone du téro” [38] (“les vieilles feuilles ça donne du terreau”), “[lé] buchron cabate” [68] (“les bûcherons ça abattent”).

⁴¹ “ifo” (*passim*) (“il faut”), “idi” [19, 21] (“il dit”), “istronpe” [19] (“ils se trompent”), “ifon” [28] (“ils font”).

⁴² “ivou sore déconféti” [20] (“il vous sort des confettis”), “ite praine dé poceture” [86] (“ils te prennent des postures”), “éjeuteudanse la grande taurtille éjteu rmu éjteufé lajaiceticulle” [105–106] (“et je te danse la grande tortille et je te remue et je te fais la gesticule”).

⁴³ “otchoze” (“autre chose”), “queqchoze” (“quelque chose”), both *passim*.

⁴⁴ “tizanne” [24] (“tisane”), “nennnufare” [46] (“nénufars”), “vinnègre” [77] (“vinaigre”), “calculler” [78–79] (“calculer”), “maisse” [80] (“maïs”), “simmetiaire” [83] (“cimetière”), “cannare” [102] (“canard”), “baubinne” [102] (“bobine”).

⁴⁵ “ski” (*passim*) (“c’est qu’il”), “dlo” (*passim*) (“de l’eau”), “danlba” [9] (“dans le bas”), “squifot cédpas sfatigué” [8] (“ce qu’il faut s’est de pas se fatiguer”), “sreposé” [8], (“se reposer”), “boudboi” [10] (“bout de bois”), “pusron” [15] (“puçeron”), “sevnu” [20] (“c’est venu”), “lafnaitre” [34], (“la fenêtre”), “cocliquau” [65] (“coquelicot”), “chminé” [68] (“cheminée”), “pandri” [69], (“penderie”), “matla” [81] (“matelas”).

⁴⁶ “on peu fer dé pome cuite avèque” [39] (“on peut faire des pommes cuites avec”), “ial suro confé dé siflé avaique” [60] (“il y a le sureau qu’on fait des sifflets avec”).

⁴⁷ “avèque” (*passim*) (“avec”), “alore” (*passim*) (“alors”), “toudtravère” [10] (“tout de travers”), “unbojoure” [16] (“un beau jour”), “leure” [31] (“leur”), “vloure” [42] (“velours”), “choufleure” [45] (“choux-fleurs”), “soleille” [56] (“soleil”), “couleure” [60] (“couleur”), “avoir pluzieure pau pource” [77] (“avoir plusieurs pots pour”).

⁴⁸ “être luné” [6] (“to be in the mood”), “se les rouler” [8–9] (“to twiddle one’s thumbs”), “foirer” [17] (“to flop”), “baisser le nez” [42] (“to hang one’s head”), “tourner de l’oeil” [71–74] (“to pass out”), “faire vinaigre” [76–77] (“to get a move on”), “se carapater” [97] (“to skedaddle”), “comme une dératée” [98] (“like a mad thing”), “pattes en l’air” [101] (“end-up”).

⁴⁹ “iaca mètre dlo” [9] (“il y a qu’à mettre de l’eau”), “izon qua grinper” [12] (“ils ont qu’à grimper”), “onpeuplu” [34] (“on peut plus”), “si onveupa” [34] (“si on veut pas”), “iapu rien” [40] (“il y a plus rien”), “sa veupa brulé” [68] (“ça veut pas brûler”).

⁵⁰ “la frèche” [99].

⁵¹ *Lettres à J.B.*, 268.

⁵² “La première déchoze ifo biné avèque une binète pour biné sète une binète quonsse sère.”

⁵³ “Dubuffet: The Nutcracker,” 212. “les radotages de Monsieur Tout-le-monde ou les élucubrations d’un jardinier radoteux” (*Détournement d’écriture*, 36).

⁵⁴ For a discussion of the parallels between the theory of Chklovski and Dubuffet’s aesthetic writings, see Jean H. Duffy, *Reading Between the Lines: Claude Simon and the Visual Arts* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1998), 13–58; Brigitte Ferrato-Combe, *Ecrire en peintre: Claude Simon et la peinture* (Grenoble: ELLUG, 1998), 49–50. The emergence of Structuralism in the 1950s and 1960s revived interest in Russian Formalism and the Prague Linguistic Circle, while the publication of Tzvetan Todorov’s translation of key Formalist texts in *Théorie de la littérature* (Paris: Seuil, 1965) brought their ideas to a much wider French public. Dubuffet’s early passion for Russian language and literature is discussed in Jakobi et Dieudonné, *Dubuffet*, 38, and in Jakobi, *Jean Dubuffet et la fabrique du titre*, 157

⁵⁵ “[Une œuvre d’art] doit être douée d’un pouvoir précieux qui est d’éclairer qui la regarde sur un aspect des choses qui lui était inconnu; elle doit avoir l’effet de régénérer sa vision, susciter chez lui une façon nouvelle de regarder les choses et de les concevoir” (Dubuffet, *Bâtons rompus*, 55).

⁵⁶ In his painting *Cafetière (ou mouleuse de café)* (1945, *Catalogue II*, no. 93), the initial stimulus came from his observation of his wife going about her domestic chores, an observation which led to a deliberation on the surprising and moving nature of this banal activity and of many other such habitual actions (“Avant-projet pour une conférence populaire sur la peinture,” *Prospectus*, I, 31–53, 31–32).

⁵⁷ These passages are strongly reminiscent of traditional botanical manuals such as those of Antoine Nicolas Duchesne or Louis Liger: respectively, *Manuel de botanique: contenant les propriétés des plantes utiles pour la nourriture, d’usage en médecine, employées dans les arts, d’ornement pour les jardins, et que l’on trouve à la campagne aux environs de Paris* (Paris: Didot, 1764); *Le ménage des champs et de la ville, ou Le nouveau jardinier françois*

accomodé au goût du temps , enseignant tout ce qui se doit mettre en pratique pour cultiver parfaitement les jardins... avec un traité des orangers, le tout suivi d'un traité de la chasse et de la pêche (Paris: Beugnié, 1715). Dubuffet refers not only to man's exploitation of nature and the garden for basics such as food, fuel, shelter and furniture, but also to his investment of meaning in them and his use of natural elements in his rituals. Cf. the references to pressing dried flowers "as a souvenir of romantic liaisons" [57], blessed boxwood [65] for Palm Sunday, the white berries of mistletoe at Christmas [82]. The last reference may also be an allusion to *Noël au sol*, 1955, *Catalogue*, XII, no. 12.

⁵⁸ There are similarities here with Gaston Chaissac's *La Soupe est à cuire* (1951, republished by Finitude, Paris in 2013) which Dubuffet admired (see Gaston Chaissac and Jean Dubuffet, *Gaston Chaissac-Jean Dubuffet, Correspondance 1946–1964* (Paris: Gallimard, 2013), ed. Dominique Brunet and Josette-Yolande Rasle, p. 382).

⁵⁹ "J'ai par ailleurs la conviction qu'il y a à gagner à accumuler les obstacles, que plus les obstacles seront graves à ce que les objets qu'on désire évoquer apparaissent, et plus augmentera l'intensité avec laquelle ils surgiront, comme un ressort se détendra d'autant plus fort qu'on l'aura d'abord plus contrarié" ("Mémoire sur le développement de mes travaux à partir de 1952," *Prospectus*, II, 91–92), this passage translated by Louise Varèse, in Peter Selz, *The Work of Jean Dubuffet* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1962), 83.

⁶⁰ "On ne se méfie pas qu'une chose quand on la nomme ça la roussit comme un coup de soleil" ("Causette," *Prospectus*, II, 67–73, p. 68).

⁶¹ "Mon dispositif fonctionne comme une machine à abolir les noms des choses, à faire tomber les cloisons que l'esprit dresse entre les divers objets, entre les divers systèmes d'objets, entre les différents registres de faits et de choses [...]" (*Prospectus*, II, 148-9).

⁶² "it is necessary"; "that one" + reflexive pronoun; "that they get cold"; "before your eyes"; "that time"; "rainwater"; "there's no reason"; "hot countries"; "romantic liaisons."

⁶³ Eleanor J. Gibson and Harry Levin, *The Psychology of Reading* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), 1975, 197–98.

⁶⁴ “[J]e viens à penser qu’on ne retrouvera le sens d’écrire, je veux dire ce qui s’appelle écrire, que quand on se décidera une bonne fois enfin à jouer avec l’orthographe des mots, changer leur genre, les assonancer un peu au gré du caprice, en nouer deux ou trois ensemble à l’occasion, de telle sorte que tous les mots ainsi traités (il faut souvent peu, la suppression ou le déplacement d’un mot suffit parfois) tout à coup par cela décapés de leurs crasse, remis à neuf, bondissent de vie et de joie. [...] Somme toute opération parallèle à celle à quoi vise ma peinture” (*Dubuffet–Paulhan*, 449).

⁶⁵ Experiments in the psychology of reading have explored the relationships between the number of ocular fixations on a given segment of text, the spatial organisation of written language and the speed of cognition, and have shown that the absence or suppression of inter-word spaces slows understanding and increases subvocalisation. It might be argued that Dubuffet not only forces his reader to revert to the early reading strategies of childhood, but also makes her/him aware of the role played by inner speech. Psychologists and literacy scholars have also drawn attention to the role played by word shape in cognitive processing and of the importance of beginning letters and end letters in early learning recognition of words. See Paul Saenger, *Space Between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Keith Raynor and Alexander Pollatsek, *The Psychology of Reading* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1989), 188–216; Insup Taylor and M. Martin Taylor, *The Psychology of Reading* (New York: Academic Press, 1983), 191–202; Stephen B. Kucer and Cecilia Silva, *Teaching the Dimensions of Literacy*, 2nd edition (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 98–99. By breaking up and conflating words, Dubuffet’s text camouflages the beginnings and endings of familiar words and radically inhibits cognitive processing of

the new units he has produced. On the fact that Dubuffet forces us to read aloud, see Thévoz, 36 and Bardelot, *op. cit.*, 1993, 84.

⁶⁶ “Ce dont la pensée souffre, ce qui lui brise les ailes, c’est la constante aimantation qu’exerce sur elle l’univoque. Cette aimantation l’ankylose. La polyphonie l’en libère. [...] La pensée s’exerce sur plusieurs rails qui se chevauchent et se contrecarrent, et non pas sur un rail unique comme s’obstine à la confiner la culture traditionnelle. Il faut lui restituer sa multiplicité” (*Bâtons rompus*, 17). Key elements of the “front matter” — the title of the series, the publisher and Dubuffet’s own name — are subjected to the same process of fragmentation and fusion.

⁶⁷ See Saenger, *The Space between Words*, 6.

⁶⁸ The relationships between eye movements, cognitive processing, contextual constraint and semantic predictability are discussed at length in the literature on the psychology of reading: Taylor and Taylor, *The Psychology of Reading*, 154–56; Raynor and Pollatsek, *The Psychology of Reading*, 113–87; Raynor, Pollatsek and Matthew Starr, “Reading,” in A. Healey and R. Proctor, *Handbook of Psychology*, 4, *Experimental Psychology* (New Jersey: Wiley, 2003), 563–66.

⁶⁹ To decode: “blé” = “wheat”; “qui ressemblait” = “which looked like”; “pète” = “farts”; “trompette” = “trumpet”; “pignon” = “gable”; “champignon” = “mushroom”; “bien” = “well”; “futé” = “crafty”; “bien affûté” = “well-sharpened”; “mou” = “soft”; “mouillé” = “soaked”; “serre” = “grips” or “greenhouse”; “cerfeuil” = “chervil”; “porte” = “carries” or “door”; “n’importe” = “no matter”; “danse” = “dance”; “dans ce cas-là” = “in this case”; “mare” = pond; “marjolaine” = “marjoram”; “pain” = “bread”; “pimpernelle” = “pimpernel”; “grain” = “grain”; “gringalet” = “puny”.

⁷⁰ “peau” = “skin”; “eau” = “water”; “an” = “year”; “pouce” = “thumb” or “inch”; “mètre” = “metre”; “fer” = “iron”; “pot” = “pot”; “au” = “to the”; “en” = “in”; “mettre” = “to put”;

“faire” = “to do/make”; “père” = “father”; “paye” = “pay”; “perd” = “loses”; “paille” = “straw”. “Fère” is used to cover the different meanings of the homophones “faire” and “fer”.

⁷¹ Note the play on “c’est qu’ils sont en bois” and “ce qui est en bois” [33], and that on “d’arrêter” (“to stop”) and “dératée” (“a crafty female” or from the expression “courir comme un dératé” meaning “to run like mad”).

⁷² See figure 1. The “quapitène avaique son plumé ai sé troi perdeu moucetahe frizé ofère son gran sabroclère” may be a reference to the *Chef en tenue de parade* of 1945 (*Catalogue* II, no. 37) and to *Moustache*, 1956 (*Catalogue* XII, no. 77)

⁷³ Note the importance of rhyme in Dubuffet’s titles: *Jardin de pousse mousse*, 1955, *Catalogue* XII, no. 9; *Jardin de vite quitte*, 1956, *Catalogue* XII, no. 20; *Trotte gigote*, 1959, *Catalogue* XVII, no. 56; *Gravier perlier*, 1959, *Catalogue* XVI, 178; *Kott bavott*, 1962, *Catalogue* XIX, no. 410; *Grivou coucou*, 1962, *Catalogue* XIX, no. 413; *Locus putatus*, 1963, *Catalogue* XX, 112 ; *Locus agitatus*, 1963, *Catalogue* XX, 113; *Locus transitus*, 1963, *Catalogue* XX, 119; *La Bariolle mariole*, 1964, *Catalogue* XX, no. 369; *Mute permute*, 1971, *Catalogue* XXVII, no. 41.

⁷⁴ Compare the juxtaposition of recognisable and whimsical shop names in many of the *Paris Circus* paintings (*Catalogue* XIX).

⁷⁵ “Une des visées constantes de tout ce cycle de L’Hourloupe est précisément de conduire l’esprit à ressentir le caractère conventionnel de l’analyse de notre monde qui préside à notre pensée, et d’inviter celle-ci à en faire un nouveau découpage tout différent, un nouvel inventaire, avec de nouvelles nomenclatures et un nouveau vocabulaire” (“Note sur les polystyrènes peints de L’Hourloupe,” *Prospectus*, III, 372–82, p. 381). Cf. his paraphrase of part of a conversation with Braque (*Lettres à J.B.*, 2).

⁷⁶ Compare his comments on *Mires*: “In these paintings you’ll no longer find any objects or figures — nothing that can be identified. However, they are in no way non-figurative. They

are intended to represent (or rather evoke) in an abridged, synthetic form, the world around us and of which we are a part. But in them this world is viewed from an unfamiliar perspective. [...] In them the humanist vision that governs our daily life and in which the world finds itself interpreted and analysed so as to be practically and intellectually accessible to man is thrown into question”; “On ne trouvera plus dans ces peintures aucun objet ni figure - rien qui se puisse nommer. Elles ne sont pourtant pas du tout non figuratives. Elles prétendent figurer (ou disons plutôt évoquer), dans une forme abrégée, synthétique, le monde qui nous environne et dont nous faisons partie. Mais ce monde y est regardé dans une optique inaccoutumée. [...] C'est qu'y est récusée en sa totalité la vision humaniste qui régit notre vie quotidienne et dans laquelle le monde se voit interprété et analysé pour devenir accessible aux besoins pratiques de l'homme et à sa pensée” (*Bâtons rompus*, 89–90).

⁷⁷ “On demande à l'art que l'habituel et le familier s'y trouvent mêlés avec le merveilleux. Où qu'il n'y a que de l'habituel il n'y a pas d'art et où il n'y a que du merveilleux c'est de la féerie qui ne nous touche pas. On aime à trouver liés dans une œuvre d'art du très réel et du très étrange (mêlés étroitement)” (“Notes pour les fins-lettrés,” *Prospectus*, I, 54–88, p. 70).

⁷⁸ “J’aime à voir la vie en difficulté, affolée, hésitant entre certaines formes que nous reconnaissons pour appartenir à notre alentour familier et d’autres qui y sont totalement étrangères et dont les voix nous étonnent” (“Causette,” *Prospectus*, II, 67–73, p. 79). Cf: “My little herbarium piece drowned in ink becomes a tree, the play of light on the ground becomes a weird cloud in the sky, becomes a whirlpool, becomes breath, becomes a cry, becomes a look. Everything gets mixed up and blends. Such are the wonders of my game and the reasons why it fascinates me so much”; “Ma petite pièce d'herbier noyée d'encre devient arbre, devient jeu de lumière au sol, devient nuage fantastique dans le ciel, devient tourbillon de l'eau, devient souffle, devient cri, devient regard. Tout se mélange et s'interfère. Tels sont

les émerveillements de mon jeu et par quoi il me passionne si fort” (“Empreintes,” *Prospectus*, II, 134–53, p. 149).

⁷⁹ For example, *Coinquet la Flibuste*, 1954, *Catalogue X*, no. 37; *L’Amphigourique*, 1954, *Catalogue X*, no. 40; *Interim stop galuche*, 1955, *Catalogue XI*, no. 171; *Étanche ibitryx monte crème*, 1955, *Catalogue XI*, no. 176; *Jardin de fouille roucoule*, 1955, *Catalogue XII*, no. 3; *Catalogue XIX*, no. 411; *Jindrinvince*, 1962, *Catalogue XIX*, no. 414; *Poiro Zanzibare*, 1962, *Catalogue XIX*, no. 282; *Trime burine*, 1961, *Catalogue XIX*, no. 52; *Falbala d’objets*, 1965, *Catalogue XXI*, no. 94; *Dédé la flibuste*, 1971; *Catalogue XXVII*, no. 108; *Pantalon d’équinoxe*, 1972, *Catalogue*, XXVII, no. 297. See also Jakobi, *Jean Dubuffet et la fabrique du titre*.

⁸⁰ For the sake of simplicity, I have “translated” into standard French. Note the number of rhymes/ endings which are also frequent in Villon’s poetry: e.g. “-on,” “-erre,” “-eau,” “-ette,” “-elle,” “-eur,” “-isse,” “-é,” “-ier,” “-ure.”

⁸¹ See Minturn, *Contre-Histoire: The Postwar Art and Writings of Jean Dubuffet*, 27.

⁸² These are too numerous to detail. See, for example, the following *Catalogue* entries: IV, nos 57, 59, 68, 70, 74, 75, 83, 102, 106, 108, 109, 151; VI, no. 63; IX, nos 14, 33, 35; X, nos 50, 86; XI, nos 30, 43, 66, 69, 89, 91, 105, 123, 128–30, 132–33, 135–38, 141–145, 180; XII, nos 9, 11, 16–17, 20, 22, 30, 43, 69, 87, 91, 116, 158; XVII, no. 44; XIX, no. 210.

⁸³ See also the various titles referring to ‘botanique’ in the *Catalogue* : III, no. 93; VI, no. 114; X, no. 89; XI, 44; XII, no. 18; XII, no. 84; XVII, no. 43; XXVII, no. 223.

⁸⁴ See *Catalogue* IV, nos 3, 5, 8, 14, 37, 39, 41–44, 51, 53, 57–59, 62–64, 68, 74–75, 77, 80–81, 83–84, 92–94, 102–104, 106, 108–109, 114, 120–22, 124–125, 131, 134, 136, 147, 149, 151, 156–157, 160, 166–167, 169, 170, 173, 185, 193, 322, 325, 333, 388, 395, 398–399, 404–406, N21, N22, 443, N 27, N44, N77–80, 485, N147, N149, 550, 551, 563, 564, 574, 578; V, nos 10–19, 28–36, 38.

⁸⁵ “la perle de mes domaines”; “qui rappelle le temps des châteaux de sable,” *Dubuffet–Paulhan*, 724.

⁸⁶ See *Dubuffet–Paulhan*, 698, 707, 716, 720, 724–25, 742; Jean Dubuffet, “La période de Vence” (Vence: Galerie Alphonse Chave, 1995), catalogue of an exhibition which took place at the Galerie Alphonse Chave, Vence, 1 July–30 September 1995 and which was co-organised by the Fondation Dubuffet. See also Jakobi, *Jean Dubuffet et la fabrique du titre*, 138, note 31.

⁸⁷ Jean Dubuffet and Alexapenosendre Vialatte, *Correspondance(s), lettres, dessins et autres cocasseries, 1947–1975*, ed. Delphine Hautbois and Marianne Jakobi (Clermont-Ferrand: Au signe de la licorne, 2004), 133, 149.

⁸⁸ Jean Dubuffet, “La période de Vence.”

⁸⁹ *Dubuffet–Paulhan*, 493. See also *Catalogue IV*, nos 44, 53, 68, 71, 88.

⁹⁰ “Ratton est assez bon botaniste” (*Dubuffet–Paulhan*, 515).

⁹¹ Note the group of paintings of carnations and of a male figure looking at, smelling and licking a carnation (*Catalogue II*, nos 41–54).

⁹² *Lettres à J.B.*, 329, 428; “Empreintes” in *Prospectus*, II, 134–53.

⁹³ “Mais, presque toujours, quand je viens à opérer, c’est tout autre chose qui se présente que ce que j’avais envisagé” (*Bâtons rompus*, 10).

⁹⁴ “Les voyages à attendre des exercices de peinture sont de ceux dont la destination n’est pas d’avance connue. On prend un billet sans savoir pour où” (*ibid.*, 91).

⁹⁵ “Ce n’est pas exactement avec n’importe quel hasard que l’artiste est aux prises, mais bien avec un hasard particulier, propre à la nature du matériau employé” (“Notes pour les fins-lettrés,” *Prospectus*, I, 54–88, p. 58).

⁹⁶ “J’ai toujours éprouvé qu’il est nécessaire, pour que mon ouvrage me plaise fortement, qu’y interviennent des effets que je n’avais pas visés et, en somme, qu’il m’apparaisse comme non

fait par moi-meme” (*Bâtons rompus*, 12). See also 10, 51, 91, *Lettres à JB*, 63, and “Notes pour les fins-lettrés,” *Prospectus*, I, 54–88, 58, 61–62, 67. Dubuffet is also exploiting the dynamic tension, exemplified repeatedly in Western art, between the garden as a site associated with the ordinary, the everyday and commonplace virtues (industriousness, orderliness, self-reliance and patience etc.) and the garden as enclosure associated with the unfamiliar, the marvellous, the secret and the revealed.

⁹⁷ See, in particular, *Catalogue* XX-XXII, but also I, no. 345; XI, no. 64; XIII, no. 13; XXII, nos 63, 65, 71; XXIII, no. 36; XXIV, no. 4.

⁹⁸ See *Prospectus*, II, 182–87, and Sophie Duplaix, Sophie Webel, Andreas Wagner, *Jean Dubuffet – Expériences musicales, Les Cahiers de la Fondation Dubuffet*, 1 (Paris: Fondation Dubuffet and NBC, 2006). On the relationship between *Art Brut* and Dubuffet’s musical experimentations, see Céline Delavaux, *L’Art Brut, un fantasme de peintre*, 286–91.

⁹⁹ For references to music, see *Catalogue*: I, nos 20–21, 56, 67–68, 234, 332, 357, 377–79; II, no. 101; IV, nos 9, 10, 18, 30, 32, 111, N91, N102, 104–6, N107–N109; V, no. 58; VII, no. 261, 276; VIII, no. 62; XX, nos 118, 252; XXI, no. 232. For references to the moon, wind, heathland, shadow, see VII, no. 50; IX, no. 32; IX, no. 64; X, no. 28; XI, no. 168; XIV, no. 98; XVI, nos 45, 96–97, 104, 107, 192, 226, 250; XVII, no. 5.

¹⁰⁰ See “Notes pour les fins-lettrés,” *Prospectus*, I, 58, 85; “Empreintes,” *Prospectus*, II, 136, 137, 146, 148. Note the following *Catalogue* entries: I, nos 27, 409, 436; II, nos 175, 177; VII, nos 246, 279; X, nos 21, 100; XII, no. 135; XV, no. 31; XVI, nos 5, 30, 290, 295; XVII, no. 49; XIX, nos 162, 209; XX, no. 178; XXII, no. 216.

¹⁰¹ Note the following: *Casse-croûte à deux*, 1945, *Catalogue* II, no. 31; *Pleurnichon*, 1954, *Catalogue* X, no. 14; *Vieillard éploré*, 1954, *Catalogue* X, no. 34; *La Pleureuse*, 1964, *Catalogue* XX, no. 254; *La Pleureuse*, 1964, *Catalogue* XXII, no. 13; *Foutriquet*, 1954, *Catalogue* X, no. 19; *Porte au chiendent*, 1957, *Catalogue* XIII, no. 102; *Le Petit Chiendent*,

1957, *Catalogue* XIII, no. 103. Note also the rhyme between the street on which the grain-merchant's shop is situated ('Rue du Bec') and the shop name 'Pue du Bec' of *La Noce Galoche*, 1962, *Catalogue* XIX, no. 418.

¹⁰² "C'est qu'on n'y voit pas clair" [100] echoes *Plu kifékler mouinkon nivoua*; 'bon pié' [74] may be an allusion to *Bonpiet beau neuille*.

¹⁰³ Note also the echoes of *Grouloulou*, 1954, *Catalogue* X, no. 1.

¹⁰⁴ As Max Loreau has pointed out, "L'Hourloupe" recalls the expression "faire une entourloupe à" (*Délits, déportements et lieux de hauts jeux* (Lausanne: Weber, 1971), 415), while, as Dubuffet himself points out, it has various other associations: "I associated it, through assonance, with 'hurler', 'hululer', 'Loup', 'Riquet à la houppe' and the title 'The Horla' from the book by Maupassant inspired by mental aberration"; "Je l'associais, par assonance, à 'hurler', 'hululer', 'loup', 'Riquet à la Houppe' et le titre 'Le Horla' du livre de Maupassant inspiré d'égarement mental" (*Biographie au pas de course, Prospectus*, IV, 510). Cf. *Petit hurleur*, 1944, *Catalogue* I, no. 231; *Hurleuse*, 1950, *Catalogue* VI, no. 21; *Barbe enfumée du brûleur de loups*, 1959, *Catalogue* XV, no. 47; *Rue de l'entourloupe*, 1963, *Catalogue* XX, no. 125; *Trotte la houle*, 1964, *Catalogue* XX, no. 368; *Scène au loup*, 1966, *Catalogue* XXIII, no. 3.

¹⁰⁵ "tas d'immondices" ("Empreintes," *Prospectus*, II, 134). The eighteen pages of *Ler dla canpane* were "illustrated with engravings on linoleum, boxwood and camembert box bottoms."

¹⁰⁶ See *Catalogue* I, nos 31–44 and V, nos 116–18, and *La Métromanie* (Paris: chez les auteurs, 1950).

¹⁰⁷ See [4], [5], [9], [15], [42], [56–57], [85]. Note also the other references to water/ wetness/ dryness.

¹⁰⁸ “Georges is arriving tomorrow matin...” (“Georges arrive demain matin...”); “Émile has left...” (“Émile est reparti...”); “That’ll teach you...” (“Ça t’apprendra...”); “Dubuffet sends his greetings...” (“Dubuffet vous salue...”); “Thank you very much my health is still excellent...” (“Merci beaucoup ma santé est toujours excellente...”); “As always your loyal servants...” (“Toujours bien dévoués à vos ordres...”); “I’ve been thinking about you since Saturday...” (“Je pense à toi depuis samedi...”); “The key is beneath the shutter...” (“La clef est sous le volet...”); “Dubuffet is a bastard, a loser, a bugger...” (“Dubuffet est un sale con, un foireux, un enculé...”). See *Catalogue I*, nos 271-86 for reproductions of the full series of *Messages*. See also the assemblages of 1954 which also incorporated scraps of newspaper. Examples include the following (*Catalogue IX*, all 1954) : *L’Homme au pardessus*, no. 115; *Paysage au nègre*, no. 116; *Paysage à trois personnages*, no. 117; *Paysage à deux personnages*, no. 117; *Personnage sur fond rouge*, no. 145; *Tête d’homme*, no. 147.

¹⁰⁹ See Shelley Cordulack, “Dubuffet and the Word Made Flesh,” 323–25. Note also Dubuffet’s declared aversion to the typewriter (*Lettres à J.B.*, 45–46; *Prospectus*, II, 369–71).

¹¹⁰ See Robert Rosenblum, “Picasso and the Typography of Cubism” in *Picasso: 1881–1973*, ed. Roland Penrose and John Golding (London: Elek, 1973), 49–75. Note too the “JOU” on page [43] of *La botte à nique* formed by the semi-obliterated “JOURS,” and the references to games in some of Dubuffet’s titles: *Jeux et travaux*, 1953, *Catalogue*, IX, no. 51; *Jeux d’ombre*, 1958, *Catalogue XVI*, nos 96–97; *Jeux et congrès*, 1959, *Catalogue XVI*, no. 316. Alongside these references to play, one also finds references in the text and in the newspaper segments to ‘travail’ [11, 71].

¹¹¹ Thus, in the newspaper collages, one finds the following series of rhyming words (or reconstructable fragments of words) which correspond to rhyme series found in the text: [ik] (public [6], explique [6], stratégique [7], Belgique [11], patriotique [11], critique [11], statistique [12]); [ɛl] (nouvelle [2], individuelle [6], appel [11], Israël [11], Bruxelles [11],

officielle [11], auxquelles [43], exceptionnelles [49]); [as] (espaces [7], terrasses [7], Douglas [11]); [ãs] (confiance [2], concurrence [6], France [2, 7, 43], performance [6], conférence [43], séance [43], négligence [43], audience [42]); [ɛʁ] (hiver [2], faire [6], [d']affaires [7], secrétaire [11], parlementaire [11], exemplaire [30], immobilière [42], CHABBERT [42]); [œʁ] (animateur [2], valeur [6, 30], intérieur [7], plusieurs [11], rumeurs [11], heure/ heures [11, 49], intérieure [11], majeur [30], EURE [42], moteur [7], administrateur [42]); [yʁ] (nature [2], ouverture [6], signature [11], mesure/ mesures [11, 30], CULTURE [42]); [e] (*passim*); [je] (miniers); [ɛn] (oxygène [6], phénomène [6], Athènes [11]); [ʃ] / [jʃ] (*passim*); [ã] (*passim*); [o] (taux [2], gros [2], eau(x), dépôt [2], beaux [6], bureaux [7], journaux [11], propos [11], numéro [41], commerciaux [42], lot [42]); [ɑ]/ [a] (l'état [2], championnat [6], Kafka [11], débutera [49]); [i] (partie [2], mercredi [11], CIC-UNATI [2], répartis [6], qualifiant [11], diplomatie [11], colonies [11], esprit [12], prix [42], lundi [42], vendredi [42], Etats-Unis [43], librairie [43]); [aʒ] (chômage [12], pèlerinage [43]); [wa] (fois [2], mois [11]); [ɥi] (puis [6], nuit [6], traduit [12], reproduit [41]).

¹¹² In letters to Paulhan from 1945 and 1950, Dubuffet expresses his enjoyment of an unidentified text by Kafka and of a production of *The Warden of the Tomb* (Dubuffet–Paulhan, 262, 624).

¹¹³ Note the additional level of play in the image on page [30], where newspaper text has been cut up and reassembled to form a collage whose general outline has a word-like appearance. Some of the other images of *La botte à nique* also have a broad word-like or graffiti-like appearance and anticipate the *Parachiffres* of 1974–1975.

¹¹⁴ See *La Ressemblance par le contact: archéologie, anachronisme et modernité de l'empreinte* (Paris: Minuit, 2008).

¹¹⁵ One further potential in-joke not mentioned hitherto relates to the abruptly introduced references to monkeys and parrots [28], [65]. While these appear at some distance from each

other in the text, they are linked by the fact that both creatures are associated with mimicry and might be read as ironic references to “art” that seeks to reproduce the real.